

Pilots Circular

ABF Operational and Safety Information

Issue 1, Oct 2001

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Balloon Accident – Canberra Festival March 2001

1. ATSB Report

The Australian Transport Safety Bureau (formerly BASI) report into this very public accident was released in August. Neville Blyth of ATSB, who assisted with the report (and is also a balloonist), recently presented and discussed it at balloon meets at Temora and Forbes in NSW.

You are recommended to read the full report, which is enclosed with this circular. This and other aviation reports can also be viewed on the ATSB website www.atsb.gov.au.

2. What can we learn from the report?

- The most likely sequence of events was: a gas tank fitting was bumped and partly cracked during the landing, causing a liquid LPG leak which was then ignited by the pilot light.
- **PILOT LIGHTS OFF BEFORE LANDING.** Turning the pilot light/s off before touchdown would very likely have avoided igniting the gas, and could have made the accident much less serious.
- **WEAR PROTECTIVE CLOTHING.** Clothing as minimal as a cotton or wool shirt, jeans and gloves was effective against flash burns. It was enough to make the difference between serious burns (2 people) and minor burns (one well covered person).
- **CHECK YOUR GAS FITTINGS.** The original fitting in this case was as shown in the ATSB report, page 5, right hand photo. **The fitting that broke was a standard gas industry replacement for the original but was not approved by the manufacturer.** The replacement part was unsuitable for a balloon tank, and was a potential danger because of its extra length. It extended beyond the metal guard ring on the top of the tank, creating a long lever which could easily be bumped by a person in the basket or by contact with other equipment (see ATSB report page 5, left photo). The weak point of the rigid fitting was only about 3/8" diameter brass. Significantly, the weak point was 'upstream' of the check valve, so that **when broken it released liquid LPG** (as the tank tap was already open).

- **DON'T ASSUME GAS WORKSHOPS KNOW ABOUT BALLOONS.** Gas fittings must be serviced, repaired or exchanged in accordance with normal gas fitting practice and Australian standards. However, **the nature of the work and the parts to be used should also be approved by the balloon manufacturer or CASA** (see details on page 2 paragraph 5 below).
- **IT COULD HAVE BEEN WORSE.** The accident could have been much more serious, and could have caused multiple deaths. The people in the basket were lucky it happened on the ground and that they escaped with only burns. Other people at the landing site and where pieces of the balloon fell could also have been killed or injured.
- **IT COULD HAPPEN TO OTHER BALLOONISTS – MAYBE YOU.** The report says this potentially dangerous combination of gas fittings may be 'relatively widely used in ballooning'. The accident happened during an otherwise fairly standard landing in good weather conditions.

3. CASA is considering how to respond

ATSB has made two recommendations to CASA (page 7 of ATSB report). The ABF is assisting CASA to decide the best course of follow-up action. The Safety Check Sheet with this circular will help us gauge the extent of the problem.

4. What YOU need to do

Balloon owners and pilots – for your own and others' safety, check your balloon equipment using the enclosed **Safety Check Sheet**. Let us know promptly if you think you have found a problem.

MA holders and balloon workshops can help too. Check any balloons brought in for service or annual/100hr inspections. Promptly advise the owner and the ABF Operations Manager of any potential problems.

5. Alterations to balloon gas fittings – correct procedure

If you wish to make any change to gas fittings on your balloon, you should:

- Have approval for the change (preferably from the manufacturer, otherwise from an authorised CASA delegate)
- Use approved parts supplied with a Release Note (usually from the manufacturer)
- Have the work done to Australian standards by an approved balloon workshop (who may contract it to an approved gas workshop).
- Have the work written in the balloon logbook by a maintenance authority holder attached to the balloon workshop, noting the Australian Standards followed by the gasfitter.
- Insert the Release Note in the balloon logbook as a record that the replacement parts were properly supplied and approved.
- If changing liquid feed fittings, remember to have the logbook signed off to confirm compliance with AD/BAL/14 (Fast Flow Restrictor Valves).
- Only fly the balloon once these steps have been completed.

Please note this is the procedure currently required under CASA regulations, it has not changed. Failure to do this is illegal and may void your insurance. If you have any difficulty complying with this procedure, you should advise the ABF Operations Manager.

6. Fixing the problem – not the blame

The balloon pilot and others involved in this accident have been impressed by the fact that ATSB is concerned only to find why the accident happened, and to avoid similar situations in future. The ABF has the same attitude. We want to make ballooning safer, and at the same time try to improve the ease and reliability of maintaining balloon equipment.

Your responses will be kept confidential, and used for statistical purposes only. If we have more information on this topic in future, your contact details will enable us to keep you informed.

Positions Vacant

The ABF is looking for one or more people to help with some specific areas during the coming year (as outlined in ABF Ops Manager Simon Fisher's report to the AGM).

This is partly to maintain the Ops Manager position as a part time job, but also to involve more ABF members who have special talents and interests.

Are you interested and able to help with one (or more) of these?

1. Maintenance Working with CASA to clarify and improve the current balloon maintenance arrangements. This is urgently and will involve some meetings and negotiations.
2. Operations Monitoring and responding to a steady stream of draft legislation as the new CASRs are formulated – this may involve also being the ABF's rep in ASAC (a position currently held by Ruth Wilson) and is best suited to someone living in Sydney or Canberra. Vital to ensure regulations are balloon-friendly.
3. Safety Setting up a Safety Management System for the ABF – a gradual process to integrate safety thinking into all our ballooning activities. Clear guidelines are available for this.

Some remuneration would be available, but realistically it will not be a high rate of pay! Volunteers who do not need to be paid are of course very welcome to apply.

Rather than define precise job specification/s at this stage, we would prefer to discuss details with any interested parties.

If you are interested and believe you are suitably qualified, please contact the ABF Operations Manager, Simon Fisher, by phone or fax on 08 8172 0196, or email sfisher@picknowl.com.au.

Sport AOC Update

Background

Previous reports on this issue have appeared in Aeronotes.

New regulations proposed by CASA would in future require all sport aviation flying training to private pilot standard to be done by instructors working under an AOC (Air Operator's Certificate), where any kind of payment or benefit is involved. A new category of AOC (Sport Aviation) is planned to facilitate this – known as 'Sport AOC' for short.

Working under a Sport AOC would allow instructors to charge for their time and for the use of a balloon provided for training.

Private pilot training – paid and free

- CASA has made it clear that it is **NOT** legal for an ABF Instructor or Examiner to charge a student if they do not have an AOC.
- Genuine cost-sharing is allowed, but this must be able to stand up to official scrutiny.
- Under the proposal, a commercial balloon operator wishing to train to private pilot level would need to apply for a Sport AOC, in addition to their normal AOC.

More options for student pilots

The ABF Executive strongly supports the principle of keeping balloon training free or as affordable as possible, and is negotiating on the Sport AOC with this principle clearly in view.

Many students have found their training options limited. Instructors and examiners can be hard to find (if free) or expensive (if they charge for training) – or both. Commercial pilots who normally carry paying passengers are often not available on weekends, which is when most students would prefer to be trained. On the other hand, many non-commercial instructors and examiners are understandably reluctant to make themselves available frequently for no reward at all.

It may be more helpful to students if instructors or examiners are able to charge, even if they only wish to charge a small amount. And if they are legally able to be paid for the use of their balloon when they train a student in it. The Sport AOC proposal is one way of achieving that, and so could improve a student's options.

Current status

Following discussions with ASAC (Australian Sport Aviation Confederation) at meetings attended by Graham Bateman and Paul Gibbs on behalf of the ABF, CASA recently issued a formal NPRM (Notice of Proposed Rule-Making).

The NPRM is number 0115SS, titled 'Introduction of Air Operator's Certificates for Sport Aviation Commercial Flying Training', and may be viewed on www.casa.gov.au. We have not sent it out as is 40 pages – if you cannot obtain a copy, please advise the ABF office. (**Please note** that 'commercial' in this document is intended to mean that the instructor can charge for the training – it does not include training for the commercial pilot licence, only the private certificate.)

The date for responding to the NPRM has been extended to 28 February 2002.

Responses to the NPRM

Please understand that the ABF Executive does NOT accept the NPRM in its present form. Other ASAC members also have many concerns. We are continuing to negotiate with CASA, through CASA/ASAC meetings. We will also be making a formal response before the closing date.

ABF members – particularly instructors and examiners – are welcome to contribute to the ABF response to CASA. All feedback will be noted even if it is not a majority viewpoint. You are also entitled to respond directly to CASA if you wish, though we strongly recommend that you contribute to our combined response.

All feedback should be addressed to the National Administrator, ABF, PO Box 402, Emerald VIC 3782 (or email AusBallooningFed@bigpond.com), to arrive no later than 14 Feb 2002.

If you prefer, you may contact the ABF Operations Manager Simon Fisher to discuss any concerns.

Broomrape PZ

A very large Prohibited Zone has been declared in South Australia, which includes Murray Bridge and Mannum and surrounding areas on both sides of the Murray River. Balloons flying from launch sites such as Birdman, Sedan, Callington, Monarto and Wellington must take care to avoid this PZ.

Size

The area is approx. 90km x 70km

Boundaries

Western boundary on 1:100,000 topographical maps 6727 and 6728, from grid ref 400640 through 344282 and 432992 to 614910.

Eastern boundary on maps 6927 and 6928, 250640 and 250910.

Status

Do not overfly. Do not land.

Reason

Large areas in this PZ are under quarantine to avoid the spread of a weed called branched broomrape. Broomrape is a fungus, and its spores easily adhere to surfaces as well as being windborne. Vehicles and shoes must be sprayed before leaving the quarantine area.

Balloons may be impounded if they land there, as it would be impractical to spray them