

Australian Ballooning Federation

PILOTS CIRCULAR

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Thanks to all the pilots around Australia who contributed to this issue.

Pilots Circular is produced by the Australian Ballooning Federation Inc., and contains operational and safety information for all Australian balloonists.

ABF pilot and student pilot members receive Pilots Circular (and a PC folder) by post as part of their annual membership. PC will also be published on the ABF website as soon as possible, for the benefit of non-pilot members.

All ABF members – from the newest student to the most experienced pilot – are invited to contribute. Tell us about issues you feel other pilots may wish to know about, or that you would like information about.

*Contributions should be sent to: ABF Operations Manager Simon Fisher
phone or fax 08 8172 0196
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Tank fittings survey

The survey responses so far have been helpful. Quite a few balloons have the same gas fittings as the balloon in the Canberra accident, but without having the same problem (ie, the rigid fittings extending beyond the tank guard ring – see Pilots Circular #1).

This can be because the tank is a larger size, so that the guard ring adequately protects the fittings.

Or it can be because a right angle elbow has been added, which turns the fittings so that they do not extend past the guard ring. Kavanagh tanks are typically supplied like this.

The problem can occur with other fittings than the ones in the Canberra accident.

It can also occur on the vapour feed side. A regulator can extend beyond the guard ring, creating a similar risk of being knocked and the rigid fittings broken.

While a vapour leak may not seem as severe as liquid, if it catches fire the results can be quite dramatic. Vapour from a bleed screw, which caught fire during refuelling recently, caused over \$1000 damage to the basket before it was brought under control. In the air it could have been far more dangerous.

The orientation of a tank in the basket can reduce the risk considerably. Some pilots have turned their tanks so that fittings which extend beyond the guard ring lie snugly along the side of basket, where they

are very unlikely to be knocked and would be difficult for a passenger to pull, either intentionally or by accident.

There is obviously no single solution. But it is likely that future Pilots Circulars will contain some clear recommendations.

Meanwhile please contact ABF Operations Manager Simon Fisher if you have any additional information or concerns. And please continue sending in the Safety Check Sheets. ☺

Sport AOC update

5 October

The Federal Minister for Transport, John Anderson, asked CASA to:

“ withdraw its proposed amendments to the civil aviation rules relating to sport aviation flying training and consult further with the sport aviation sector ...

“...The proposed amendments would have required many organisations conducting sport aviation flying training to hold a formal Air Operators Certificate (AOC) from CASA. In the past, these organisations have been regulated by the relevant sport aviation body, [such as the Australian Ballooning Federation] ...

“...The amendments would have increased the cost of sport aviation flying training and involved additional bureaucratic complexity. However, the sport aviation bodies have an excellent record of administering their areas of responsibility and their safety record is generally very good.”

1 November

CASA boss Mick Toller announced that *“CASA’s Board has commissioned a review which will look at whether*

operators in the aerial work category need to have an AOC. It is possible that aerial work AOCs could be replaced with a simpler form of certification or that none will be required.”

3 November

ASAC meeting – Danny Galbraith attended for the ABF.

All members present were in favour of the Sport AOC proposal being withdrawn. Danny expressed the ABF position that the draft legislation is unnecessary and expensive. It does not address the practical realities of balloon training.

ABF response to the NPRM

The deadline for responses has been extended to 28 February 2002. **The ABF will argue strongly for a more workable approach.** ☺

NPRM 0115SS, titled ‘Introduction of Air Operator’s Certificates for Sport Aviation Commercial Flying Training’, may be viewed on www.casa.gov.au. Your comments are welcome, and should reach the ABF Office or the ABF Operations Manager by 14 February.

Protect your nylon poles

It is not well known that nylon basket poles contain moisture. They can dry out during a long hot spell, causing them to become brittle and break more easily.

Replacing them is expensive and may keep you from flying. Some precautions are:

1. Soak your poles overnight in a bath of water once or twice during the dry season.
2. Don’t drive around with your basket rigged.
3. Don’t overstress poles when tethering.

☺

Coming in the mail

1. Reissue of ABF pilot certificates

ABF pilot and student pilot certificates are being reissued and posted out with membership renewals for 2002.

The new certificates carry the additional wording:

‘The holder of this certificate may only operate in foreign airspace with the permission of the relevant aviation authority.’

This is NOT a change of rules, but simply recognition of a situation which has always existed. ABF members were reminded of this late in 1999. Following an ICAO audit, CASA was required to ensure that we also added the information to our certificates.

Under ICAO rules, a licence issued by CASA (eg, a commercial balloon pilot licence) does allow the holder to fly an Australian registered aircraft overseas.

However, a certificate issued by a sporting aviation body (such as the ABF or the Gliding Federation of Australia) does not give this privilege. To fly any balloon overseas, whether Australian registered or not, a private balloon pilot must first get approval from the aviation authority of the country concerned. The aviation authority may accept the ABF certificate, or may require pilots to pass one or more theory exams and possibly a flight test – requirements vary.

Balloon pilots attending overseas events may be covered by a general approval arranged for the event. Pilots should check this with the event organisers and if necessary with the relevant aviation authority.

An FAI Sporting Licence may be required in order to participate in some balloon events, but this is not an approval to fly a balloon in a country outside Australia.

2. Pilots Circular folder

A blue folder to hold issues of Pilots Circular will also be mailed to all ABF certificate holders, either with your membership renewal or soon after. Please put previous issues and all future issues of Pilots Circular in this folder. This will be your ongoing reference to current ABF Operations and Safety matters. You should keep it together with your ABF Operations Manual.

3. VFR Flight Guide

ABF certificate holders will also receive a copy of the VFR Flight Guide. The ABF Executive has arranged for the Guide to be sent to each ABF certificate member, as a practical reference to some useful ballooning information, and to encourage a wider understanding of the Australian aviation system.

The VFR Flight Guide is a CASA reference book for pilots of all kinds of aircraft involved in visual flying. It has a very readable format, with simple clear diagrams and charts.

For private balloon pilots it makes a practical alternative to buying the CARs, CAOs and AIP. Most of the key information from these is easier to find and read in the Guide. Please note it is still essential to refer to ERSA and the AIP charts for areas where you wish to fly.

For commercial balloon pilots who already subscribe to the full CASA documents and updates, the Guide may help by indicating which CAR or CAO to read for fuller information.

Get familiar with the Guide, keep it handy and refer to it when necessary.

Additional copies of the Guide are available from Airservices Australia at \$19.95 each plus postage.



Powerline incident

This recent incident in Australia involved a 105,000 cu ft balloon in stable weather with a 5 knot wind.

Incident report

During an uneventful training flight with two students on board the instructor asked a student to practise some low level flying across approx 1km of wooded area. After some time the instructor identified a large cleared area where a final landing could be made. The cleared area continued ahead for approx 1 km with trees to the right and a house to the left amongst more trees higher up on a bank.

The instructor asked the student to make an intermediate landing at the start of the cleared area. The student kept the balloon at tree top level and had good control of the balloon as they approached. As the student was making the final stages of the landing, the instructor suddenly saw a set of powerlines in front of the balloon. The instructor immediately pulled the red line.

The balloon made contact with the powerlines causing them to touch together and spark as the basket touched the ground. The student quickly turned off the fuel and the three people left the basket. The balloon was still standing and touching only one wire. The balloon was pulled back away from the wire and deflated, and two small burn holes were found in the fabric.

Instructor's comments

'Not sure how to prevent this other than having local knowledge. There are about 5 or 6 lines like this in this heavily flown area. Asking other pilots seems to be the way. I wanted to give the student low level practice, which didn't help our cause because neither of the nearest power poles could be sighted from this low position. On the right the pole was in the wooded area and on the left it was amongst the house and trees. Having flown so low for so long also made it hard to identify any other oncoming problems such as livestock.

'As we were on descent and I did not have hands on the burners, I felt the only option was to rip. The decision to pull the balloon back off the power line was made after inspecting the balloon to find it was only touching one wire.'

National Safety Officer's comments

Avoid low flying. It can be useful training, but not worth the risk if it's so low you can't be sure what's ahead. Either fly well clear of treetops, or climb periodically to get a good view ahead.

Identify hazards in advance. In a well flown area, mark your map wherever you identify a hazard. Share info with other pilots.

Expect power lines. Assume that a house, shed, pump, or any structure is likely to have power. Ask the question 'where is the power line?' Look for the poles, then ALL the wires coming off them. If you can't identify the power lines, stay above power line height.

If powerline contact occurs. 'If in doubt, rip out' is the rule of thumb. The instructor did well to take control and pull the rip promptly. It's best to deflate and land immediately if you're not sure you can fly over the line. Power line contact around basket level is likely to be far more dangerous than high up on the envelope. The envelope is not very likely to conduct electricity (though a thermistor wire or damp fabric can). It's also better to avoid the weight of the basket hanging from the line.

Turning off the fuel – leaving the basket – moving the balloon. **These actions were potentially very dangerous.** A pilot in a similar situation in South Australia, who had landed with his envelope lying over a powerline, received a shock when he turned around and touched the gas tank to turn the fuel off. His right arm was severely damaged as a result.

'Watch Out For Power Lines'

This excellent booklet is sent to all new student pilots. Extra copies are available from the ABF Office. It was prepared by the NSW Office of Energy with help from Balloon Aloft and Kavanagh Balloons. The advice given by the power authorities is:

STAY WHERE YOU ARE – unless there is immediate danger. Get someone to contact the power supply authority and ensure the line is switched off before you touch anything or leave the basket.

KEEP CLEAR OF METAL, especially tanks and steel cables. Do not turn the gas off or pull the balloon away until the line is switched off.

Crew and others arriving at the scene should **STAY BACK, STAY CLEAR AND CALL FOR EXPERT HELP.**

- DON'T ASSUME that nothing is live, just because nobody has had a shock yet.
- DON'T ASSUME that the power is off, just because wires touch together and spark. Even if current does stop, it may start again after a few seconds.
- DON'T ASSUME that the balloon envelope will not conduct electricity.
- DON'T ASSUME the ground is not live. Electric current may be flowing to ground at any time.

If the decision is made to leave the basket, **DIVE OUT AND HOP AWAY** to avoid step current.



POWERLINE CONTACT IN FRANCE – SIX DEAD

On 26 August 2001, near Verrens-Arvey in the Savoie district of France, balloon pilot Roger Fugier and 5 passengers died after their balloon hit high tension lines. Fire apparently started on board after the powerline strike, and two people jumped overboard to their death. Two others were hurled into the sky as the gas tanks exploded. The pilot and a final passenger were found in the remains of the basket.

The story (in *Paris Match* magazine) noted that the pilot had taken up ballooning some twenty years ago, and was considered an expert balloonist – he had flown in the French Alps, and across the Pyrenees. It appeared he had not seen the fatal power line.

ELECTRICITY IS INVISIBLE... AND DEADLY.

Flying in the Bushfire Season

Summer flying arrangements in Australia are different from state to state. Permits are required to fly a balloon in some areas.

Local arrangements vary, and you are strongly advised to check with local balloonists and bushfire authorities.

The following notes are intended as a general guide only.

Fire Danger Season

A Fire Danger Season is declared in most parts of central and southern Australia, roughly between November and April. Dates vary between districts, and the published dates may be changed at short notice if necessary.

During the Fire Danger Season strict rules apply to lighting any kind of fire in the open, including gas barbecues. A balloon may be treated as a gas appliance or as an aircraft – interpretation varies – but either way the fire authorities are generally prepared to facilitate ballooning provided it is done carefully.

Ground crew may be required to carry a water fire extinguisher or knapsack spray, and know how to use it. Minimum size is usually 9 litres. It should be ready to hand when inflating the balloon.

The launch area should be clear of flammable material. A cleared radius of 4 metres around the burner may be required. A well-watered local oval can make a good safe launch site.

Total Fire Bans

On days of extreme fire danger, a Total Fire Ban may be declared in a given district. Bans are usually announced the night before, but may be announced (or cancelled) on the day if weather conditions are not as forecast.

Total Fire Ban days are often hot and windy, and unsuitable for ballooning. However, commercial balloon operators may get a permit to fly on total ban days in NSW or Victoria, and may fly in the ACT. Notification is usually required to the bushfire authority within 24 hours before flying. Special conditions may apply.

Farmer Relations

The ABF expects all balloon pilots to use **common sense** and **courtesy** during the high fire risk season. Remember that farmers and others who make their living from the land may be concerned at a large flame flying over their property. Showing them how the pilot lights are turned off before landing can help them to be more relaxed. A visit to your local rural fire brigade is also very good PR. ☺

SUMMER FLYING GUIDE

	<u>Fire Danger Days</u>	<u>Total Fire Ban Days</u>	<u>You can contact</u>
ACT	follow fire rules	commercial may fly	Rural Fire Service
NSW	follow fire rules	commercial permit available	Rural Fire Service
NT	use common sense	all balloons may fly	Outback Ballooning
Qld	use common sense	all balloons may fly	Rural Fire Brigades
SA	follow fire rules	balloons don't fly	SABAC or Country Fire Service
VIC	all balloons require Schedule 14 permit	commercial balloons may get Section 40 permit	Country Fire Authority
WA	private and commercial balloons normally don't fly		WABAC