

Australian Ballooning Federation

PILOTS CIRCULAR

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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 is also available on the ABF website www.abf.net.au for all to read.

All ABF members – from the newest student to the most experienced pilot – are invited to contribute to PC on issues you feel other pilots may wish to know about, or to raise questions that you would like information about. Thanks to all the pilots around Australia and others who have contributed to this issue.

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Incident - envelope destroyed

Incident summary

A larger size envelope was completely destroyed by a grass fire while partially inflated. The fire appeared to come from beneath the Nomex scoop, and may have been started by a cigarette butt dropped by a passenger before the balloon was laid out. The pilot had just started hot inflation (only 2 litres of propane had been used) when flames came from all around the scoop. Despite emptying one water and four powder extinguishers onto the blaze, the balloon pilot and crew could not stop the grass burning under the envelope, which was a total write-off. There were no injuries, and no damage to the basket and fuel system.

National Safety Officer comments

It is sobering to think how easily this envelope was destroyed, and how much worse the damage might have been without the extinguishers and trained crew.

The balloon owner and authorities were satisfied that all normal safety procedures were followed. Passengers had been instructed not to smoke at all, and there were no other apparent fire hazards. Perhaps the main lesson from this incident is simply that we need to be extra vigilant during the summer season.

Are you ready for summer? Read the Summer Flying checklist on the next page.



SUMMER FLYING

Due to the current drought in Australia:

- Bushfire risk is heightened,
- Fire Danger Season has started earlier in some areas (around Adelaide it has started a month earlier than usual), and
- Farmers are more sensitive about losing income because of fire.

Fire safety and good farmer relations are more important than ever this summer.

A Checklist for Summer Flying

Fire extinguishers	Recently inspected Ready to hand when inflating
Crew and passengers	No smoking! Natural fibre clothing, sturdy shoes, long sleeves Know how to use your fire extinguishers
Gas equipment	Burner and tanks in good working order Seals checked recently Any minor gas leaks have been fixed
Inflation	No dry grass or other flammable material for 4 metres radius Asbestos blanket under the burner for extra protection
Landing	PILOT LIGHTS OUT! (Always – not just in summer)
Farmer relations	Tell farmer all flames are out before touching the ground Better still – demonstrate how this is done.

Fire Danger 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 guide only.

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.

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 ACT. Notification is usually required to the bushfire authority within 24 hours before flying. Special conditions may apply.

SUMMER FLYING – STATE BY STATE

This is a general guide only – check local details

	<u>Fire Danger Days</u>	<u>Total Fire Ban Days</u>	<u>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	balloons may fly	Outback Ballooning
Qld	use common sense	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

A fire waiting to happen?

At a recent balloon gathering, one balloon was seen with:

- its fire extinguisher not inspected in the last two years
- no fitting for the extinguisher in the basket
- rigid gas fittings that extend beyond the guard ring of the tank (as warned about in a major accident report in Pilots Circular Issue 1 last year).

The pilot has been advised to attend to these items without delay. They will also be discussed with the MA holder who carried out the annual inspection. The balloon is not airworthy without a current fire extinguisher. The extinguisher should also be within reach in a suitable holder and easy to remove in a hurry. And if the rigid tank fittings are not approved by the manufacturer, this would also make the balloon unairworthy.

Accidents typically happen as a result of several contributing factors, each of which may seem minor by itself. We all need to ask – ‘how many ‘small’ items need attention on my balloon?’ Remember the balloon owner and pilot are responsible for the airworthiness of a balloon – not just the maintenance person. ☺

Incident – refuelling

Summary

A balloon pilot was hit in the face and eyes by propane accidentally released from a refuelling connector hose.

The pilot had been refuelling a tank in a basket on a trailer, using his own refuelling connector hose fitted to the end of the bulk LPG tank hose. The refuelling connector hose had been disconnected from both the bulk tank hose and the tank being filled. The refuelling connector hose had a lever action valve at one end (similar to the main valve on a balloon burner). As the pilot stepped down from the trailer, this lever caught in the pilot's safety gauntlet (long glove), opening the valve and causing propane to be released towards the pilot's face.

The pilot was treated for cold burns at the emergency department of the local hospital. There was no permanent eye damage.

Pilot's comments

I had just removed my sunglasses which would have protected my eyes better! I now refuel using gloves rather than gauntlets. I also prefer to bleed any remaining propane from the connector hose *before* I move the hose away – whereas previously I felt it was safer to take it away and bleed it at a distance.

National Safety Officer comments

The pilot was very lucky not to have damaged his eyes. Yes – glasses or safety goggles would give more protection. One potential cause of this accident is insufficient attention. Another is the long gauntlets which may be more likely to catch in something. But a serious consideration is the design of the connector hose, which has a lever action valve. The lever sticks out at right angles to the hose when the valve is closed, and is therefore easy to knock accidentally. It takes only a small movement to open the valve.

A safer type of connector hose has a self-sealing valve at each end, and a separate bleed screw (similar to the one on a balloon tank). The bleed screw is much harder to open accidentally than a lever action valve.

The pilot was using a flexible refuelling connector (ie, a hose) which he had been advised was safer than a rigid fitting. I totally agree with this. The hose should be short so there is less gas to bleed off after refuelling. BETTER STILL – HAVE AUTOMATIC FILL LIMITERS fitted to your tanks. That way you can refuel at LPG stations without bleeding off, and without needing a connector hose at all. ☺

Index to Pilots Circular

The index to topics in PC will be issued at the end of each year. The first issue is enclosed. Keep it at the back of your PC folder for easy reference.

**Get your maintenance up to date –
and fly safely this summer!**