

NTSB#: FTW98LA064

On December 6, 1997, approximately 0925 mountain standard time, a member of the ground crew was fatally injured when she fell from an Adams A55S hot air balloon, N1063V, at Gallup, New Mexico. The balloon was not damaged. Visual meteorological conditions prevailed, and no flight plan was filed for the personal flight conducted under Title 14 CFR Part 91. The flight originated in Gallup approximately 0805.

The following is based on the pilot's written statement that was included with his accident report, and subsequent telephone conversations. His balloon, Angel Dancer, was one of numerous hot air balloons participating in the Red Rocks Balloon Rally. The pilot attended a briefing at 0700, and the balloon was launched at 0805. He landed several times to allow passengers to disembark and other passengers to board. Although the wind remained calm, the pilot was concerned that the sun warming the red cliffs would cause increased air current movement. He decided to attach a drop (or tether) line for ground personnel to use to keep the balloon in the immediate area. On the last landing, the pilot vented heat from the envelope to insure loss of buoyancy, then instructed one of the passengers to step out but to keep his weight on the basket. The passenger complied. The second passenger exited before the pilot could give similar instructions, and the balloon began to ascend. Unable to hold the balloon down, the ground crew released their weight from the basket as the pilot had instructed them to do in safety briefings. The pilot immediately pulled the vent line, but the balloon continued to ascend at a "moderate rate." The pilot then noticed a shadow hanging from the balloon. Looking down, he saw one of his ground crew members holding on to one of the rope handles, located along the bottom edge of the basket. The balloon was 15 to 20 feet in the air and continued to ascend. The pilot continued to vent the envelope. Other members of the ground crew held onto the tether line. The balloon reached a maximum altitude of 75 to 80 feet before it began to descend. When it was approximately 40 feet above the ground, the crew member said she couldn't hold on anymore and fell to the ground.

In another written statement, the pilot's wife (a member of the ground crew) said the fatally injured party had been a member of the ground crew for about two years. She had attended safety meetings conducted by the pilot and "knew his drill about hands on and hands off," and "not to hold the balloon by those rope handles."

Two other members of the ground crew submitted corroborating written statements. The pilot said 10 or 12 people comprised his ground team.

A home video of the accident appeared on Albuquerque's KOAT-TV evening news. The television station refused to provide NTSB a copy of the tape. A subpoena was served and the tape was released. A review of the tape revealed the camera was some distance from the balloon and details were difficult to discern. The tape did not provide any insight into the accident.

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NTSB Identification: **LAX03LA097**.

Accident occurred Tuesday, February 25, 2003 in YOUNTVILLE, CA

Probable Cause Approval Date: 09/01/2004

Aircraft: FIREFLY 11B, registration: N1501H

Injuries: 1 Fatal, 1 Uninjured.

A bystander sustained fatal injuries after falling from a balloon. Although the scheduled flight had been canceled, the pilot was going to lift the balloon several hundred feet into the air so that the passengers could take a picture of the balloon in flight. As the balloon was being repositioned by five members of a ground crew, two bystanders grabbed onto the basket and it ascended more than the pilot had planned. She called to everyone to release. The five crew members and one bystander released; however, one bystander continued holding onto the balloon. During the ascent, the pilot realized the bystander was hanging on and told him to hang on while she descended. However, the bystander was unable to hold on and fell to his death. Tetrahydrocannabinol (marijuana) levels in the bystander suggested use within the hour and significant impairment.

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be:

A bystander was impaired by drugs and did not follow the pilot's directive to release the balloon as it began its ascent.

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NTSB #: LAX03LA097

On February 25, 2003, about 0755 Pacific standard time, a bystander fell from a Firefly 11B balloon, N1501H, during departure from Yountville, California. Bonaventure Balloon Company was operating the balloon under the provisions of 14 CFR Part 91. The commercial pilot was not injured; the bystander sustained fatal injuries. The balloon was not damaged during the local positioning flight. Visual meteorological conditions prevailed, and no flight plan had been filed.

The pilot reported that the flight was canceled as a result of poor weather conditions. However, she was going to lift the balloon into the air so that the scheduled passengers could take a picture of the balloon in flight. This required repositioning the balloon around a tree. The balloon was approximately 5 feet off the ground during the repositioning, with five ground crew members assisting in the repositioning. Two of the bystanders (passengers) came from behind and grabbed onto the handles at the bottom of the basket. This resulted in the balloon impacting the side of the tree. The pilot said, "Let go and hold the ropes," intending to raise the balloon back up 5 feet to clear the tree.

The ground crew chief realized the two bystanders were latched onto the balloon and said, "Let go!" The balloon ascended and one of the bystanders did not release the balloon. It continued to ascend to approximately 100 feet above ground level (agl) and the pilot realized that the bystander was hanging from the balloon. She told him to "...hold on..." but after a short time he released the balloon. The loss of weight resulted in the balloon ascending another 100 feet. The pilot landed uneventfully moments later.

A toxicological test for carbon monoxide, cyanide, volatiles, and drugs was completed on the bystander at the Federal Aviation Administration Toxicology and Research Laboratory, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. The test was positive for the following:

0.0081 (ug/ml, ug/g) of tetrahydrocannabinol detected in blood;
an unquantified amount of tetrahydrocannabinol carboxylic acid detected in blood;
0.0385 (ug/ml, ug/g) tetrahydrocannabinol carboxylic acid detected in bile;
0.024 (ug/ml, ug/g) propoxyphene detected in blood;
0.157 (ug/ml, ug/g) propoxyphene detected in liver;
0.135 (ug/ml, ug/g) norpropoxyphene detected in blood;
and 1.85 (ug/ml, ug/g) norpropoxyphene detected in liver.

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NTSB #: NYC04LA217

On September 25, 2004, at 1830 eastern daylight time, a Firefly Galaxy 9 balloon, N2200Z, received minor damage when it impacted trees near Lewisburg, West Virginia. The certificated commercial pilot received fatal injuries and the six passengers were not injured. Visual meteorological conditions prevailed and no flight plan was filed for the local flight conducted under 14 CFR Part 91.

According to the passengers, they had landed in a field, and all of the occupants had exited the balloon, when a small airplane flew "very low" over the top of the balloon. At the same time, the balloon began to ascend, with the pilot hanging onto the outside of the basket. One of the passengers asked the pilot "if he was ok," to which he replied, "yes, I know a trick." The pilot proceeded to wrap a rope around his leg, and the balloon continued to ascend. As it reached an altitude of about 80 feet, the pilot fell from the outside of the basket.

According to the pilot of the passing airplane, he was on a "five-mile final," and had been cleared to land at the Lewisburg Greenbrier Airport, when he noticed a hot air balloon, on the ground, 1/2-mile ahead of him, and to his right. The pilot requested a 360-degree turn from the control tower, and then performed a descending right turn, passing over some small trees on the southeast side of the balloon.

The pilot then turned back to the airport, about 1/2 mile northeast of the balloon, at an altitude of 3,100 feet MSL. The balloon then began to rise, and the pilot observed a man running toward the balloon. The balloon ascended to approximately 100 to 120 feet AGL with the man hanging under the basket. It then began to drift southwest over several tall trees. At that point, the man fell from the balloon.

Examination of the balloon by a Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) inspector revealed the balloon sustained minor damage when it impacted trees.

The elevation at the Greenbrier Valley Airport (LWB), Lewisburg, West Virginia, was 2,302 feet MSL.

An autopsy was performed on the pilot by personnel of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Charleston, West Virginia, on September 27, 2004.

Toxicological testing was conducted on the pilot at the FAA Toxicology Accident Research Laboratory, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

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NTSB Identification: **LAX05LA094**.

Accident occurred Wednesday, February 09, 2005 in Cave Creek, AZ

Probable Cause Approval Date: 01/31/2006

Aircraft: Cameron Balloons A-250, registration: N3037V

Injuries: 1 Serious,3 Uninjured.

On February 9, 2005, about 1645 mountain standard time, a passenger fell and fractured her collarbone while boarding a Cameron Balloon A-250, N3037V, near Cave Creek Arizona. Hot Air Expeditions was operating the balloon under the provisions of 14 CFR Part 91. The commercial pilot and two passengers were not injured; one passenger sustained serious injuries. The balloon was not damaged. The local sightseeing flight was boarding prior to departure, and was to land elsewhere in Cave Creek. Day visual meteorological conditions prevailed, and a visual flight rules (VFR) flight plan had not been filed.

The pilot submitted a Pilot/Operator Aircraft Accident Report (NTSB Form 6120.1/2). He stated that, prior to the envelope's hot air inflation, he had two of the passengers preboard the balloon due to one of the female passenger's physical limitations and speed of the surface wind. He stated that the estimated surface wind was 4-5 mph. As he started hot air inflation of the balloon, the envelope started to stand upright. At that time, he instructed the third passenger to board. As she started to climb up using the footholds, the side of the basket that she was on lifted off the ground causing her to lose her balance and fall to the floor of the basket. A medical examination revealed that she had a broken collarbone.

The pilot stated that the balloon and heater had no mechanical failures or malfunctions during the flight.

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be:

the pilot's inadequate handling of the balloon during boarding resulting in a passenger falling and sustaining a serious injury.

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NTSB Identification: **IAD05CA141**.

Accident occurred Saturday, September 24, 2005 in Louisville, KY

Probable Cause Approval Date: 01/31/2006

Aircraft: Lindstrand Balloons 77A, registration: N4024P

Injuries: 1 Serious, 2 Uninjured.

On September 24, 2005, at 0905 eastern daylight time, a Lindstrand 77A hot air balloon was undamaged during landing at Bowman Field Airport (LOU), Louisville, Kentucky. The certificated commercial pilot and the passenger were not injured, and a ground crewman was seriously injured. Visual meteorological conditions prevailed, and no flight plan was filed for the flight that originated from Bowman Airport. The personal flight was conducted under 14 CFR Part 91.

A Federal Aviation Administration aviation safety inspector witnessed the accident and provided a statement. According to the inspector, the crewman grabbed onto the basket of the balloon upon landing. As she did so, her feet slipped from under her on the wet grass, and the balloon lifted into the air.

When the basket of the balloon reached about 8 feet above the ground, the crewman lost her grip, and fell to the ground, where she broke her wrist and fractured her pelvis.

The inspector described the balloon landing as "normal." He said that the crewman was experienced, and that she knew to release a balloon should it resume flight during a landing. He added that the ground crewman stated that she held onto the basket only because she had lost her footing.

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be:

The ground crewman's failure to release the basket of the balloon when it resumed flight during the landing phase. A factor in the accident was the wet grass at the landing site.

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NTSB Identification: **NYC06CA022**.

Accident occurred Sunday, October 30, 2005 in Bethlehem Twp., NJ

Probable Cause Approval Date: 02/28/2006

Aircraft: Cameron Balloons O-90, registration: N4066X

Injuries: 1 Serious, 1 Uninjured.

A ground crewmember was assisting in the inflation and launch of a hot air balloon. Just prior to lift-off, as the pilot was adding heat for the climb out, the crewmember became entangled in the two vent lines that were draped outside of the balloon's basket. When the balloon lifted off, the crewmember was lifted approximately 75 feet above ground level. The pilot attempted to lose altitude by venting hot air from the envelope, but was unable, as both vent lines were wrapped about the crewmember's right ankle. The pilot then attempted to get the crewmember closer to the ground by aiming at a small tree. The balloon struck the tree at a downward angle, the crewman became untangled, fell through a barn roof, and sustained serious injuries.

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be:

The ground crewmember's inadvertent entanglement in the balloon's vent lines.

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NTSB Identification: **DFW07CA201**.

Accident occurred Sunday, September 16, 2007 in Bossier City, LA

Probable Cause Approval Date: 12/20/2007

Aircraft: Ultra Magic M-56C, registration: N105WB

Injuries: 2 Serious.

The hot air balloon landed hard during an organized balloon festival. The 472-hour commercial pilot reported that while attempting to land the hot air balloon within the "target area," he and the passenger were ejected from the basket during a hard landing. The balloon bounced and became airborne without any of the occupants. The pilot attempted to control the balloon by holding onto the balloon's tether rope. The unoccupied balloon ascended with the pilot holding onto the rope. The pilot was seriously injured when he was no longer able to hold onto the rope and fell to the ground. In the recommendation section of the Pilot/Operator Aircraft Accident Report (NTSB Form 6120.1), the pilot stated that the accident could have been prevented if he would have used a slower rate of descent. The winds at the time of the mishap were reported from 110 degrees at 4 knots.

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be:

The pilot's failure to arrest an excessive descent rate prior to ground contact, which resulted in a hard landing.

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NTSB Identification: **WPR10LA300**

Accident occurred Friday, June 18, 2010 in Grants Pass, OR

Probable Cause Approval Date: 01/07/2011

Aircraft: ARBC INC DBA LINDSTRAND 120A, registration: N501LB

Injuries: 1 Serious, 1 Uninjured.

On June 18, 2010, about 0820 Pacific daylight time, an individual fell from the exterior of the basket of a Lindstrand 120A hot air balloon, N501LB. That individual received serious injuries when he impacted the grassy terrain of an elementary school playground in Grants Pass, Oregon. The pilot of the balloon, who was the sole interior occupant, was not injured. The balloon, which was owned and operated by the pilot, was not damaged. The 14 Code of Federal Regulations Part 91 flight departed a city park in Grants Pass about 90 minutes prior to the accident. Visual meteorological conditions prevailed at the time of the accident. No flight plan had been filed.

According to the pilot, at the end of the flight he landed in a grassy area of an empty elementary school playground. After the landing, three of the four passengers were instructed to climb out of the basket, and to keep their weight on the top rim of the basket as the still inflated balloon was moved along the ground to the location where it was going to be deflated. After reaching the location where the balloon was to be deflated, the last passenger was instructed to exit the balloon, but to keep her weight on the top rim of the basket as the other passengers were doing. Soon after the last passenger exited the basket and applied her weight to the top rim of the basket, the basket shifted as one of the individuals holding it adjusted the position of their weight. As the balloon shifted, one of the individuals who was providing downward force on the basket released their hold on the basket because they interpreted the shift as the lift-off of the basket. This individual released their hold because all those participating had been briefed to let go of the basket if it began to lift off the ground. Once that person removed their weight from the basket, the balloon began to ascend, and the three remaining individuals holding onto the basket released their grip on the top rim. But then, as the balloon continued to ascend, one of the individuals who had released his grip on the basket rim grabbed onto the rope handles near the base of the basket, and was therefore lifted into the air as the balloon continued its ascent.

The pilot did not initially realize that someone was hanging from the bottom of the basket, but when he heard others yelling for that individual to let go, he became aware of the situation. At that time the pilot immediately began venting air from the top of the balloon in order to get it rapidly back on the ground, but before the pilot was able to get the balloon's basket back on the ground, the individual holding onto the rope handles lost his grip and fell approximately 20 feet to the terrain below.

The individual who fell from the balloon does not have memory of the event, but according to the pilot, this individual had worked as part of his ground crew, and taken occasional flights with him, for over 20 years. The pilot stated that this individual had a long term familiarity with the rule that you do not hold onto the basket of a balloon once it begins to ascend. It could not be determined why the individual grabbed onto the handles at the base of the basket after releasing his hold from the basket rim.

Pilot killed in Quebec hot air balloon accident

[CBC News](#) Posted: Aug 11, 2013 11:26 AM ET Last Updated: Aug 11, 2013 5:14 PM ET



Pilot killed in hot air balloon accident

A pilot with the international hot air balloon festival has died following an accident near Mont-St-Grégoire, Que. Mont-St-Grégoire is located near this weekend's festival in St-Jean-sur-Richelieu. (Google Maps)

Maxime Trépanier, 26, was rushed to hospital in a "critical state" after an accident at about 7:30 a.m. today in Mont-St-Grégoire, which is near the festival in St-Jean-sur-Richelieu.

His death was confirmed this afternoon by Marie-Claude Beauvais, the head of marketing with the festival.

"It's a tragic day," Beauvais said.

She said Trépanier, whose father was also a hot air balloon pilot, had been around hot air balloons since his childhood. He grew up to be one of the pilots with the festival's own fleet. To pay homage to the pilot and father of two, the festival is grounding its balloons for the evening. Beauvais said they will light-up at about 6:30 p.m. in memory of Trépanier.

Beauvais said the festival, which is marking its 30th anniversary, will continue as planned, but with a more sombre tone. Quebec provincial police Sgt. Audrey-Anne Bilodeau said police will be investigating the incident.

QMI AGENCY -- MONTREAL -- A 26-year-old father and hot air balloon pilot fell to his death Sunday afternoon at the International Balloon Festival of Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, QMI Agency has learned.

Sources at the scene told QMI Agency that after successfully landing his balloon, Maxime Trepanier was helping another team land theirs when he was lifted into the air by a cable and fell to his death moments later.

Balloonist killed at Quebec festival was tangled in ropes

Maxime Trépanier, 26, was lifelong balloonist, father of 2 children

[CBC News](#) Posted: Aug 12, 2013 8:36 AM ET Last Updated: Aug 12, 2013 7:58 PM ET

A 26-year-old hot-air balloon pilot, killed in an accident at a Quebec festival on the weekend, may have died trying to help another pilot land his balloon.

Quebec provincial police and the Transportation Safety Board are investigating the [Sunday morning incident at the St-Jean-sur-Richelieu International Hot Air Balloon Festival](#), and have released few details about circumstances surrounding the death of Maxime Trépanier.

Quebec provincial police told Radio-Canada that their initial investigation showed that Trépanier was trying to help another team land a balloon when he got into trouble.

For some reason, the balloon went back up, taking Trépanier with it. He then fell from an undisclosed height.

Maxime Trépanier died Sunday morning at the St-Jean-sur-Richelieu hot air balloon festival.

Police said they don't believe the death was criminal.

Friends of Trépanier said he was an experienced pilot and had been around hot air balloons all of his life. They said the routine procedure wasn't risky, and it appears it was just a freak accident.

"The balloon was too fast, and Maxime grabbed the line, and then the pilot decided to go up because it was unsuitable to land and probably Maxime was tangled up in that rope and he went away with the line," said Leo Burman, a pilot and instructor who taught Trépanier.

The son of a pilot himself, Trépanier had two children of his own and was a firefighter. "His parents were flying [for] about 25 years or more ..., so he was acquainted to all the operations of ballooning, and he was a good pilot and he was known as a talented pilot," Burman said.

His colleagues from the Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu fire department were at the festival last night as pilots, friends and family members paid tribute to Trépanier by lighting up their balloons in unison. Marie-Claude Bovet, the festival's marketing and development director, said Trépanier would have wanted the festival to go on, but a decision was made to ground the balloons last night.

An autopsy is scheduled to take place today in Montreal.

The annual festival, which attracts around 450,000 people a year, continues until Aug. 18.