



Aviation Investigation Final Report

Location:	Rochester, Minnesota	Accident Number:	CEN24LA139
Date & Time:	March 20, 2024, 19:03 Local	Registration:	N5236R
Aircraft:	AEROSTAR INTERNATIONAL INC S53A	Aircraft Damage:	Substantial
Defining Event:	Collision with terr/obj (non-CFIT)	Injuries:	2 Minor, 1 None
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General aviation - Personal		

Analysis

The pilot reported that as he was attempting to land the hot air balloon in a field, the wind shifted and increased in speed. The pilot attempted to abort the landing but was unable to arrest the balloon's descent. The balloon contacted power lines which resulted in an electrical arc and a shower of sparks. The arc severed 12 of the 16 flying wires, and the remaining flying wires failed in a manner consistent with overload. The basket separated from the envelope and came to rest on its side.

The balloon sustained substantial damage to the flying wires, attachment hardware, and the basket support structure.

The pilot reported that there were no preaccident mechanical malfunctions or failures with the balloon that would have precluded normal operation. The wind at the time of the accident was 350° at 9 knots.

Probable Cause and Findings

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

The pilot's failure to maintain clearance from power lines while landing in a field.

Findings

Personnel issues	Monitoring environment - Pilot
Aircraft	Altitude - Not attained/maintained
Environmental issues	Wire - Ability to respond/compensate
Environmental issues	(general) - Effect on operation

Factual Information

History of Flight

Landing	Collision with terr/obj (non-CFIT) (Defining event)
----------------	---

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Commercial	Age:	67,Male
Airplane Rating(s):	None	Seat Occupied:	Right
Other Aircraft Rating(s):	Balloon	Restraint Used:	None
Instrument Rating(s):	None	Second Pilot Present:	No
Instructor Rating(s):	None	Toxicology Performed:	
Medical Certification:	Class 2 With waivers/limitations	Last FAA Medical Exam:	April 1, 2023
Occupational Pilot:		Last Flight Review or Equivalent:	April 19, 2023
Flight Time:	852 hours (Total, all aircraft), 700 hours (Total, this make and model), 3 hours (Last 90 days, all aircraft)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	AEROSTAR INTERNATIONAL INC	Registration:	N5236R
Model/Series:	S53A	Aircraft Category:	Balloon
Year of Manufacture:	2005	Amateur Built:	
Airworthiness Certificate:	Balloon	Serial Number:	S53A-3091
Landing Gear Type:	None	Seats:	1
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	January 22, 2024 Annual	Certified Max Gross Wt.:	1350 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:		Engines:	0
Airframe Total Time:	170 Hrs at time of accident	Engine Manufacturer:	
ELT:	Not installed	Engine Model/Series:	
Registered Owner:	On file	Rated Power:	
Operator:	On file	Operating Certificate(s) Held:	None

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	Visual (VMC)	Condition of Light:	Day
Observation Facility, Elevation:	KRST,1305 ft msl	Distance from Accident Site:	4 Nautical Miles
Observation Time:	19:00 Local	Direction from Accident Site:	283°
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Clear	Visibility	10 miles
Lowest Ceiling:	None	Visibility (RVR):	
Wind Speed/Gusts:	9 knots /	Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:	None / None
Wind Direction:	350°	Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:	N/A / N/A
Altimeter Setting:	30.16 inches Hg	Temperature/Dew Point:	-3°C / -19°C
Precipitation and Obscuration:	No Obscuration; No Precipitation		
Departure Point:	Rochester, MN	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	None
Destination:	Rochester, MN	Type of Clearance:	VFR
Departure Time:	18:45 Local	Type of Airspace:	Class D

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	1 Minor	Aircraft Damage:	Substantial
Passenger Injuries:	1 Minor, 1 None	Aircraft Fire:	None
Ground Injuries:	N/A	Aircraft Explosion:	None
Total Injuries:	2 Minor, 1 None	Latitude, Longitude:	43.959822,-92.465712

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Rutt, Brian
Additional Participating Persons:	Daniel L. Sindt; Federal Aviation Administration - Minneapolis FSDO; Minneapolis, MN Gregory J. Thurston; Federal Aviation Administration - Minneapolis FSDO; Minneapolis, MN
Original Publish Date:	July 11, 2024
Last Revision Date:	
Investigation Class:	Class 4
Note:	The NTSB did not travel to the scene of this accident.
Investigation Docket:	https://data.nts.gov/Docket?ProjectID=193972

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) is an independent federal agency charged by Congress with investigating every civil aviation accident in the United States and significant events in other modes of transportation—railroad, transit, highway, marine, pipeline, and commercial space. We determine the probable causes of the accidents and events we investigate, and issue safety recommendations aimed at preventing future occurrences. In addition, we conduct transportation safety research studies and offer information and other assistance to family members and survivors for each accident or event we investigate. We also serve as the appellate authority for enforcement actions involving aviation and mariner certificates issued by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and US Coast Guard, and we adjudicate appeals of civil penalty actions taken by the FAA.

The NTSB does not assign fault or blame for an accident or incident; rather, as specified by NTSB regulation, “accident/incident investigations are fact-finding proceedings with no formal issues and no adverse parties ... and are not conducted for the purpose of determining the rights or liabilities of any person” (Title 49 *Code of Federal Regulations* section 831.4). Assignment of fault or legal liability is not relevant to the NTSB’s statutory mission to improve transportation safety by investigating accidents and incidents and issuing safety recommendations. In addition, statutory language prohibits the admission into evidence or use of any part of an NTSB report related to an accident in a civil action for damages resulting from a matter mentioned in the report (Title 49 *United States Code* section 1154(b)). A factual report that may be admissible under 49 *United States Code* section 1154(b) is available [here](#).