



AVIATION



HIGHWAY



MARINE



RAILROAD



PIPELINE

# Aviation Investigation Final Report

<b>Location:</b>	Guilford, Connecticut	<b>Accident Number:</b>	ERA23LA315
<b>Date &amp; Time:</b>	July 23, 2023, 21:24 Local	<b>Registration:</b>	N4522E
<b>Aircraft:</b>	HEAD BALLOONS INC AX8-88	<b>Aircraft Damage:</b>	None
<b>Defining Event:</b>	Aircraft loading event	<b>Injuries:</b>	1 Serious, 3 None
<b>Flight Conducted Under:</b>	Part 91: General aviation - Aerial observation		

## Analysis

The pilot had been operating the hot air balloon for several hours and was providing tethered flights to passengers at a fairground during a night event. The pilot described that at the conclusion of a several minute flight, he would land and exchange passengers. To maintain the weight of the balloon during the passenger exchange, one passenger would disembark and then would be replaced by a boarding passenger. There were also several (volunteer) ground crewmembers who would keep their weight on the balloon's basket and help control the flow of passengers in and out of the basket.

Shortly before the accident, the pilot was assisting a passenger with boarding when two passengers unexpectedly disembarked. The balloon suddenly started to rise, and the pilot yelled, "clear, watch the ropes," which was the signal to the ground crewmembers to take their hands off the basket and to make sure that none of the exiting passengers got caught in the tether ropes. As the balloon rose, the pilot felt a shake, and when he looked over the side of the basket, he saw one of the ground crewmembers lying on the ground. One of the passengers described that when she stepped off the balloon, it began rising. She saw a ground crewmember hanging on the outside of the basket as it climbed. When the balloon reached about 15 to 20 feet above the ground, the ground crewmember let go. The ground crewmember was seriously injured during the fall.

## Probable Cause and Findings

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

The pilot's inadequate supervision of the boarding process and the ground crewmember's failure to immediately let go of the balloon after it began an inadvertent climb.

## Findings

Personnel issues	Task monitoring/vigilance - Pilot
Personnel issues	Delayed action - Ground crew

## Factual Information

### History of Flight

Other	Aircraft loading event (Defining event)
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### Pilot Information

Certificate:	Commercial	Age:	74,Male
Airplane Rating(s):	None	Seat Occupied:	None
Other Aircraft Rating(s):	Balloon	Restraint Used:	None
Instrument Rating(s):	None	Second Pilot Present:	
Instructor Rating(s):	None	Toxicology Performed:	
Medical Certification:	None	Last FAA Medical Exam:	
Occupational Pilot:	Yes	Last Flight Review or Equivalent:	
Flight Time:	2328 hours (Total, all aircraft), 60 hours (Total, this make and model), 2310 hours (Pilot In Command, all aircraft), 23 hours (Last 90 days, all aircraft), 10 hours (Last 30 days, all aircraft), 5 hours (Last 24 hours, all aircraft)		

### Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	HEAD BALLOONS INC	Registration:	N4522E
Model/Series:	AX8-88	Aircraft Category:	Balloon
Year of Manufacture:	1992	Amateur Built:	
Airworthiness Certificate:	Balloon	Serial Number:	183
Landing Gear Type:	None; Other launch/recovery system	Seats:	4
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	October 1, 2022 Annual	Certified Max Gross Wt.:	1500 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:		Engines:	0
Airframe Total Time:	659 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:	Night
Observation Facility, Elevation:		Distance from Accident Site:	
Observation Time:		Direction from Accident Site:	
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Unknown	Visibility	
Lowest Ceiling:		Visibility (RVR):	
Wind Speed/Gusts:	/	Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:	/
Wind Direction:		Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:	/
Altimeter Setting:		Temperature/Dew Point:	
Precipitation and Obscuration:			
Departure Point:	Guilford , CT	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	None
Destination:	Guilford , CT	Type of Clearance:	None
Departure Time:		Type of Airspace:	

## Airport Information

Airport:	Fairground NONE	Runway Surface Type:	
Airport Elevation:	7 ft msl	Runway Surface Condition:	Dry
Runway Used:		IFR Approach:	None
Runway Length/Width:		VFR Approach/Landing:	None

## Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	1 None	Aircraft Damage:	None
Passenger Injuries:	2 None	Aircraft Fire:	None
Ground Injuries:	1 Serious	Aircraft Explosion:	None
Total Injuries:	1 Serious, 3 None	Latitude, Longitude:	41.27954,-72.67627(est)

## Administrative Information

<b>Investigator In Charge (IIC):</b>	Gunther, Todd
<b>Additional Participating Persons:</b>	Michael Newman; FAA/FSDO; Bradely, CT
<b>Original Publish Date:</b>	February 20, 2024
<b>Last Revision Date:</b>	February 22, 2024
<b>Investigation Class:</b>	<a href="#">Class 4</a>
<b>Note:</b>	The NTSB did not travel to the scene of this accident.
<b>Investigation Docket:</b>	<a href="https://data.nts.gov/Docket?ProjectID=192734">https://data.nts.gov/Docket?ProjectID=192734</a>

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](#).