



GREAT EASTERN BALLOON ASSOCIATION, INC.

December 19, 2018

Mr. Bill English
National Transportation Safety Board
Washington, DC 20591

Mr. English:

The Great Eastern Balloon Association (GEBA) was formed in 1986 as an association of balloon pilots and crew created for balloonists in the middle-Atlantic states of the USA. We currently have approximately 350 members. GEBA is managed totally by volunteers. Improving safety is our number one goal. GEBA has been providing Continuing Education Safety Seminars annually since 1986. These seminars provide pilots and crew essential information to improve safety in ballooning. Attendees may receive Wings credit for attending the seminars.

Dr. McKay made a comment about pilots belonging to balloon organizations. In addition to GEBA and the Balloon Federation of American there are about 16 active regional balloon organizations throughout the United States. We want to recognize and applaud those clubs that put on seminars and disseminate safety information. We thank the BFA for creating the guidelines for these seminars. However, the seminars are totally organized by these balloon organizations. Pilots do not have to be members to attend these seminars. Pilots receive valuable safety information from these seminars. As an additional incentive, they receive a discount on their insurance.

Safety is also addressed via additional classes and demonstrations provided by GEBA throughout the year. Some of the programs we have offered include:

- Propane Safety
- Fire Safety Training
- CPR and First Aid
- Power Line Avoidance video is available to share at seminars

Our Power Line Avoidance seminar was the only balloon educational seminar ever to have received a grant from the Airline Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA). The grant allowed us to reach out to members and non-members. The seminar was developed for lighter-than-air operations.

In the three decades producing ballooning seminars we have learned the high value of success that education can bring to improving safety. Two years ago we began structuring sessions specifically related to Commercial pilot instructors.

Our hope is that this approach can be formally expanded as part of the recommendations to help avoid a repeat of the terrible tragedy in Lockhart, Texas. Existing online training within the Wings program could augment new courses designed for commercial balloon applications. We would like to assist in implementing some of the topics.

These Wings topics include:

- Aeronautical decision making,
- Aeronautical charts
- FAR's,
- Medication awareness

New courses could include topics such as

- Personal minimums check lists
- Weather courses detailing Skew T plots, RUC winds, and temperature dew point scenarios.
- This should be part of the Airmen Certification Standards

Balloon insurance companies could help implement this training by requiring it for coverage as they have in the past for standard seminars. Making at least the online courses a yearly requirement would help commercial pilots review the basics of the decision management process necessary for safe flight.

One of the common themes brought up at the hearing on December 9th was the lack of any major changes in ballooning regulations over the past thirty years. Observing NTSB statistics during that same time frame we see a significant decrease in the total number of ballooning accidents decade after decade.

- 1987-1996 223
- 1997-2006 157
- 2007-2016 current 122

It is our conviction the decrease in accidents during this period was primarily the result of an increase in education developed and implemented by the ballooning community to encourage a more safety minded approach to decision making before and during our flights.

We believe that the positives of added regulations in areas such as drug testing will be outweighed by the negative financial impacts of those requirements. They would have the potential to severely reduce the number of commercial balloon pilots to educate the next generation. As attested to by a number of doctors at the hearing, would medical certification be an effective solution to improve interdiction of medically unfit pilots than drug testing.

If a determination is made that new regulations are unavoidable at this time, our hope would be those regulations are aligned with the cause of this investigation; the loss of sixteen lives from the crash of a large capacity balloon system. These large capacity balloon systems, carrying more than eight passengers, are relatively new to the sport and may need to be more closely monitored by the FAA.

In closing the Great Eastern Balloon Association would like to thank the National Transportation Safety Board for its continuing efforts to make aviation as safe as possible. If there is any way that we can help in that endeavor, please contact us at the email addresses listed below.

Thank you for your time,

Tony Saxton, President
info@weflyhotair.com

Emelia Bernava, Vice-President
dreamworks.lta@verizon.net

Joe Doerer, Director
jdoerer@gmail.com