



U.S. Department
of Transportation
**Federal Aviation
Administration**

Office of Accident Investigation & Prevention

800 Independence Ave., SW.,
Washington, DC 20591

February 16, 2017

Mr. William English; Investigator-in-charge
Office of Aviation Safety (AS-10)
National Transportation Safety Board
490 L'Enfant Plaza, SW
Washington, DC 20594

Dear Mr. English:

During the NTSB's public hearing this past December regarding the investigation into the July 2015 Texas commercial balloon accident, I was asked to have FAA provide information to you regarding the number of times that the FAA conducted a Part 91 surveillance activity on a balloon operation during the past three calendar years, excluding those conducted during large balloon festivals or airshows. This memorandum conveys the requested information.

A lengthy search and review of our Program Tracking and Reporting System (PTRS) data indicate that the FAA conducted at least **2,300** Part 91 inspections of balloons during the time period from January 1, 2014 until December 16, 2016. The data (attached) was searched in all three possible coding categories of data input – *Make/Model/Series (MMS) Code*, *National Field Use Code*, and *Manufacturer Name* (all three data spread sheets attached). The data was then culled for use of the following "Activity Codes":

Activity Code	Description of Inspection	Type of Inspection
1622	SURVL/OPER/RAMP CHECK	Operations
1661	SURVL/AIRM/RAMP	Operations
1737	INVSTG/COMPLAINT	Operations
3460	ACFT/EQUIP/CERTIFICATION SUPRT	Maintenance
3470	ACFT/EQU/TECH ASSIST NO CERT	Maintenance
3627	SURVL/OPER/INSP RAMP CHECK	Maintenance
3681	SURVL/MISC/INSP 91 SPOT/RAMP	Maintenance
3694	SURVL/MISC/INSP ACFT RECORDS	Maintenance
3740	INVSTG/COMPLAINTS	Maintenance
5627	SURVL/OPER/INSP RAMP CHECK	Avionics
5694	SURVL/MISC/INSP ACFT RECORDS	Avionics
5740	INVSTG/COMPLAINTS	Avionics
5785	INVSTG/TECH ASST NO CERT	Avionics

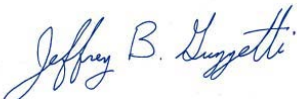
The data was then reviewed in the aggregate and at a high level, as the time involved to review each of the 2,300 detailed PTRS narratives would have been excessive. Our review of the data indicates the following:

- The FAA conducted a total *at least* 2,300 Part 91 inspections of balloons during the time period from January 1, 2014 until December 16, 2016.
- The vast majority of the inspections was coincident with nearly 100 balloon gatherings of varying sizes during the 3-year period (i.e. an average of about 33 balloon gatherings each year during the 3-year period reviewed).
- Many of the inspections occurred with small groups of two or three balloons/pilots being inspected on the same date and location, while other entries indicate *large gatherings* of balloon inspections (from 20 up to 70) at the same event, such as the Balloon Fiesta in New Mexico each October.
- About 825 inspections from the total set of 2,300 – roughly 36 percent -- occurred at *small gatherings* of less than 20 balloons.
- About 42 inspections from the total set of 2,300 -- -- roughly 2 percent -- were “*solo*”, i.e. only one balloon inspection occurred on the same date and location.
- The inspections occurred at locations throughout the entire Continental U.S., with more in the Southwestern region of the country where weather conditions favor balloon operations.
- The highest number of surveillance events was in the categories ramp checks and records reviews.

Please keep in mind that balloons are not “parked” at airport ramps like airplanes, and balloon operations are not typically conducted near airports. Therefore, FAA inspectors conduct their surveillance activities in outlying locations in which balloons are staged, inflated, and launched. There are typically other balloons in the same area during these operations, including commercial balloon operators. Additionally, the destination landing sites for balloons are also unpredictable and not near airports.

I hope this information is responsive to your request. Please contact me should you have any further questions regarding this matter. I can be reached by email at Jeffrey.guzzetti@faa.gov , or telephone at (202) 267-7788.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey Guzzetti
Manager, Accident Investigation Division (AVP-100)

Enc: Electronic Data Spreadsheets (3)