

WITNESS STATEMENT  
OF



NAME:  
DOB:  
ADDRESS:

Jonathan Duehon

Rio Rancho, New Mexico 87144

PHONE #:

Cell

On October 10, 2008 (Friday) I was a witness to an accident involving a hot air balloon in northern Rio Rancho.

I was across from the accident before and after it had took place. The balloon appeared to have two souls aboard. The flight path of the balloon was in a northeast direction, traveling between 15 and 20 knots. In the area of the accident, wind gusts were between 20 and 25 knots.

As the balloon proceeded towards me, I paid close attention to the pilot. I noticed that there was no heat given to the envelope, therefore leading me to believe that the intentions of the pilot were to lose altitude and only strike the powerlines with the envelope.

This was not the case. The balloon was flying over a ditch/slope and encountered an updraft from the low level winds, causing this accident.

Upon collision with the power lines, the lines from the propane tanks severed, which was also an indication that the pilot did not shut down the pressure for the tanks.

In the end the transformers overloaded and the occupant aboard the gondola fell to the ground. The balloon envelope began a fire at the gondola attachment points and blew in a north-north easterly direction.

I have provided photos to assist in the investigation.

10/10/2008

Date

Witness Signature



RIO RANCHO DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY  
DIVISION OF POLICE

Effective Date: 12-01-93  
Revised Date: 02-28-01

Control Number: DPS/PD.026

VOLUNTARY STATEMENT

NAME: JAMES ARCHER DATE: \_\_\_\_\_  
ADDRESS: [REDACTED] TIME: 7:50 - 7:55  
LOS ANGELES CA 90015 CASE #: \_\_\_\_\_  
DOB: [REDACTED] SSN: [REDACTED] PHONE: [REDACTED]  
EMPLOYER & ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

JAMES ARCHER willingly and voluntarily give this statement. No promises or threats have been made to me to obtain this statement. I understand that I have a right to remain silent; I do not have to say anything; anything I do say may be used in court against me; I am entitled to talk to a lawyer before giving a statement, and to have a lawyer present during questioning; and if I want a lawyer, but do not have the money to hire one, a lawyer may be provided for me.

STATEMENT

I SLOWED DOWN THINKING THE BALLOON WAS GOING TO LAND IN FRONT OF ME ON HIGHWAY, 100 YD OR SO AHEAD. THEN HE HIT POWER LINES. THE BALLOON SWUNG FORWARD AND THE POWER LINES TOUCHED. THEY EXPLODED. ONE MAN WAS HIT BY EXPLOSION, THE BALLOON STARTED TO BURN. THE SECOND MAN CAUGHT ON FIRE AND TRIED TO ESCAPE. HE JUMPED AFTER 30 SECONDS OR SO. IT SEEMED LIKE HE WAS CAUGHT ON SOMETHING. HE FINALLY JUMPED. I CALLED 911. THE BALLOON BURNED FOR 10 MINS. OR MORE. THEN EXPLODED, FREED ITSELF FROM LINES AND MOVED AWAY. AS THE BALLOON FREED ITSELF THE 2ND MAN (BURNED IN BALLOON) FELL TO THE GROUND. THIS ALL HAPPENED ABOUT 50 YDS IN FRONT ME. THE MAN IN THE BALLOON HIT BY THE EXPLOSION NEVER MOVED AFTER THE EXPLOSION. HE WAS COVERED IN FLAMES THE ENTIRE TIME.



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DIVISION OF POLICE

Effective Date: 12-01-93  
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Control Number: DPS/PD.026

VOLUNTARY STATEMENT

NAME: Paul R Berg DATE: 1/1/00

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_ TIME: \_\_\_\_\_

CASE #: \_\_\_\_\_

DOB: \_\_\_\_\_ SSN: \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_ WK: \_\_\_\_\_

EMPLOYER & ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

I, \_\_\_\_\_, willingly and voluntarily give this statement. No promises or threats have been made to me to obtain this statement. I understand that I have a right to remain silent; I do not have to say anything; anything I do say may be used in court against me; I am entitled to talk to a lawyer before giving a statement, and to have a lawyer present during questioning; and if I want a lawyer, but do not have the money to hire one, a lawyer may be provided for me.

STATEMENT

I was Driving Down South on Hwy 528  
by Wal-Mart witness a balloon Flying  
East into the Power Lines it Bl@w up  
it had to people in basket one jumped  
out then the other Guy was on Fire  
in basket for at least 5 min before  
he fell out



RIO RANCHO DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY  
DIVISION OF POLICE

Effective Date: 12-01-93  
Revised Date: 02-28-01

Control Number: DPS/PD.026

VOLUNTARY STATEMENT

NAME: Isaiah Carpenter

DATE: 10/10/08

ADDRESS: [REDACTED]

TIME: 8:11

Angel Fire NM

CASE #: \_\_\_\_\_

DOB: [REDACTED] SSN: [REDACTED] PHONE: [REDACTED]

EMPLOYER & ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

I, \_\_\_\_\_, willingly and voluntarily give this statement. No promises or threats have been made to me to obtain this statement. I understand that I have a right to remain silent; I do not have to say anything; anything I do say may be used in court against me; I am entitled to talk to a lawyer before giving a statement, and to have a lawyer present during questioning; and if I want a lawyer, but do not have the money to hire one, a lawyer may be provided for me.

STATEMENT

We were drive down HxH 528 and watching the bollar and we look to the right at the high and we saw the bollar dropping fast and it hit the power line and started on fire and we ~~stop~~ pulled over and went down to the person in the ditch and there was a man in the bollar on fire and the the EMTs showed up.

[REDACTED]

10-1008



RIO RANCHO DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY  
DIVISION OF POLICE

Effective Date: 12-01-93  
Revised Date: 02-28-01

Control Number: DPS/PD.026

VOLUNTARY STATEMENT

NAME: Edward Reyes

DATE: 10/10/08

ADDRESS: [REDACTED]

TIME: 8:11

CASE #: \_\_\_\_\_

DOB: [REDACTED] SSN: [REDACTED] PHONE: [REDACTED] WK: \_\_\_\_\_

EMPLOYER & ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

I, \_\_\_\_\_, willingly and voluntarily give this statement. No promises or threats have been made to me to obtain this statement. I understand that I have a right to remain silent; I do not have to say anything; anything I do say may be used in court against me; I am entitled to talk to a lawyer before giving a statement, and to have a lawyer present during questioning; and if I want a lawyer, but do not have the money to hire one, a lawyer may be provided for me.

STATEMENT

The balloon collided with the electric  
wires the basket started on fire, the one  
man jumped out, but the other man was  
knocked unconscious and started on fire  
than fell out of the inflated basket / all  
occured about 7:50



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Effective Date: 12-01-93.  
Revised Date: 02-28-01

Control Number: DPS/PD.026

VOLUNTARY STATEMENT

NAME: Aimee Grant

DATE: 8/10/10/08

ADDRESS: [REDACTED]

TIME: 8:15

Bernalillo NM, 87004

CASE #: \_\_\_\_\_

DOB: [REDACTED]

SSN: [REDACTED]

PHONE: [REDACTED]

WK: \_\_\_\_\_

EMPLOYER & ADDRESS: Cracker barrell

I, Aimee Grant, willingly and voluntarily give this statement. No promises or threats have been made to me to obtain this statement. I understand that I have a right to remain silent; I do not have to say anything; anything I do say may be used in court against me; I am entitled to talk to a lawyer before giving a statement, and to have a lawyer present during questioning; and if I want a lawyer, but do not have the money to hire one, a lawyer may be provided for me.

STATEMENT

My sister + I were watching the balloons fly over our house. + we saw the "upside down pyramid" balloon w/ two men in it. seconds later we saw + heard it hit the power lines on 528. we drove over as I called 911 and we witnessed the balloon basket burning. then we saw a man on fire fall out of the balloon. we screamed for the cops to help him but I don't think they could hear us.



RIO RANCHO DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY  
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Effective Date: 12-01-93  
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VOLUNTARY STATEMENT

NAME: Hendra Rockwell

DATE: 10-10-08

ADDRESS: [REDACTED]

TIME: 8:13 am

CASE #: \_\_\_\_\_

DOB: [REDACTED]

SSN: [REDACTED]

PHONE: [REDACTED]

WK: \_\_\_\_\_

EMPLOYER & ADDRESS: Taco Bell on 528

I, Hendra Rockwell, willingly and voluntarily give this statement. No promises or threats have been made to me to obtain this statement. I understand that I have a right to remain silent; I do not have to say anything; anything I do say may be used in court against me; I am entitled to talk to a lawyer before giving a statement, and to have a lawyer present during questioning; and if I want a lawyer, but do not have the money to hire one, a lawyer may be provided for me.

STATEMENT

we were watching this balloon fly over our house and we were going to go chase some. as we were getting ready to leave we heard the electric shock as it hit the power line. we rushed over to find the bucket on fire. the power line started to make blue sparks. the bucket was on fire. the bucket broke loose half way tipping it sideways. the gas that sets the flame was spraying everywhere. the bucket was engulfed and the ~~man~~ man flipped out to the ground. then the balloon flew away after the bucket burned away.

JOUK  
DISK



# RIO RANCHO DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY DIVISION OF POLICE

Effective Date: 12-01-93  
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## VOLUNTARY STATEMENT

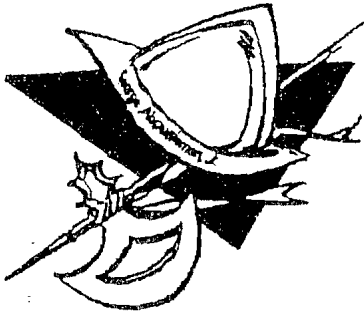
NAME: GERALD J. GURULE DATE: 10 OCT 2008  
ADDRESS: [REDACTED] TIME: 0755  
BERNALILLO NM 87004 CASE #:  
DOB: [REDACTED] SSN: [REDACTED] PHONE: [REDACTED] WK: [REDACTED]  
EMPLOYER & ADDRESS: [REDACTED]

I, GERALD J. GURULE, willingly and voluntarily give this statement. No promises or threats have been made to me to obtain this statement. I understand that I have a right to remain silent; I do not have to say anything; anything I do say may be used in court against me; I am entitled to talk to a lawyer before giving a statement, and to have a lawyer present during questioning; and if I want a lawyer, but do not have the money to hire one, a lawyer may be provided for me.

### STATEMENT

ON 528 HWY A BALLOON HIT THE POWER LINES AND CAUGHT ON FIRE I WITNESSED  
ONE PERSON IN THE BALLOON ON FIRE AND ONE PERSON ON FIRE JUMPED AND FELL IN  
ARROSO. WHEN POLICE ARRIVED BALLOON BROKE FREE FROM POWER LINES AT THAT  
TIME PERSON IN BALLOON FELL OUT OF BALLOON.





# Town of Bernalillo

"The City of Coronado"

Mayor

CHARLES J. AGUILAR

Councilors

M. HELEN SANDOVAL

SERAFIN DOMINGUEZ

EDWARD W. TORRES III

RONNIE A. SISNEROS

## Voluntary Statement

CASE # \_\_\_\_\_

Name: Gwen McCoy  
D.O.B: \_\_\_\_\_  
S.S.N: \_\_\_\_\_  
Home Add: \_\_\_\_\_  
Employer: UPS Store

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Work Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Cell/Pager: \_\_\_\_\_  
Work Add: \_\_\_\_\_

I, Gwen McCoy, voluntary give this statement regarding the investigation of  
Balloon Crash

I have been advised of my rights and understand that this statement may be used against me. I volunteer the following information of my own free will, for what ever purposes it may serve.

I am 46 years of age and live at \_\_\_\_\_

NM 87141

STATEMENT: When the power went out I assumed a balloon had hit a power pole.

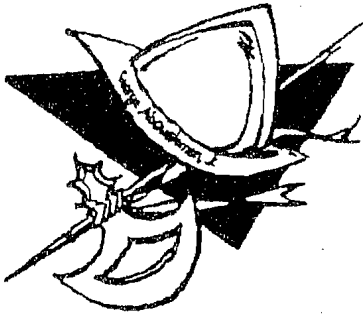
Went to look out the front window and the balloon was overhead with the gondola on fire.

Ran to get camera. Snapped a few pictures, then watched 2 items fall to ground over Albertsons parking lot or just to north of there. Looked like a pair of shoes and the bottom floor of the gondola.

Watched balloon envelope float off over the Santa Ana Reservation area.

I have read each of this statement consisting of 1 page(s), each page of which bears my signature and corrections if any, bear my initials and I certify that the facts contained herein are true to the best of my knowledge

Date: 10/10/2008 Time: 11:25 Signature: \_\_\_\_\_



# Town of Bernalillo

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M. HELEN SANDOVAL

SERAFIN DOMINGUEZ

EDWARD W. TORRES III

RONNIE A. SISNEROS

## Voluntary Statement

CASE # \_\_\_\_\_

Name: Christopher A Boyer  
D.O.B: [REDACTED]  
S.S.N: [REDACTED]  
Home Add: [REDACTED]  
Employer: Subway

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Work Phone: [REDACTED]  
Cell/Pager: [REDACTED]  
Work Add: \_\_\_\_\_

I, Chris Boyer, voluntary give this statement regarding the investigation of  
Hot Air Balloon crash

I have been advised of my rights and understand that this statement may be used against me. I volunteer the following information of my own free will, for what ever purposes it may serve.

I am 23 years of age and live at 537 Tulip RD #A Rio Rancho NM 87124

STATEMENT: I walked out of walmart and saw the ~~Hot~~ Hot Air Balloon on fire. then the fire started to go out for about a minute or two then the fire was out. Then the fire started back up and it was more intense then the first time. So I open up my phone and took a couple pictures. Then the Balloon broke fire and started to fly away from the power lines on fire. As it flew over the wal-mart parking lot it dropped pieces of the Balloon on the ground.

I have read each of this statement consisting of \_\_\_\_\_ page(s), each page of which bears my signature and corrections if any, bear my initials and I certify that the facts contained herein are true to the best of my knowledge.

Date:    20    Time:        Signature: [REDACTED]



BERNALILLO POLICE DEPARTMENT  
739 CAMINO DEL PUEBLO  
P.O. BOX 638  
BERNALILLO, NEW MEXICO 87004

## VOLUNTARY STATEMENT

Bernalillo PD Case # \_\_\_\_\_

Today's Date: 10/10/08

CAD # \_\_\_\_\_

Name: Monica Valdez

DOB: [REDACTED]

Address: [REDACTED]

SSN: [REDACTED]

City: Rio Rancho

Phone: [REDACTED]

Employer: Sandoval County SO

Work Address: [REDACTED]

Work #: [REDACTED]

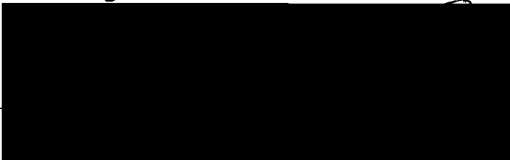
I, Monica Valdez, voluntarily give this statement regarding the investigation of balloon crash. I am 22 years of age.

### STATEMENT:

On 10/10/08 while on my way to work, I was traveling south on Hwy 528 just south of Wal-Mart when I witnessed a balloon strike a powerline. The powerline then ignited into flames and I witnessed several unknown objects falling from the balloon. (The objects were ~~on~~ on fire). The balloon then escaped from the powerline, ~~and~~ the basket and objects from the balloon were still on fire. I then saw the balloon heading in the direction of my vehicle. At that point Officer Reams of Bernalillo PD told me to RUN! I then got out of my vehicle and ran.

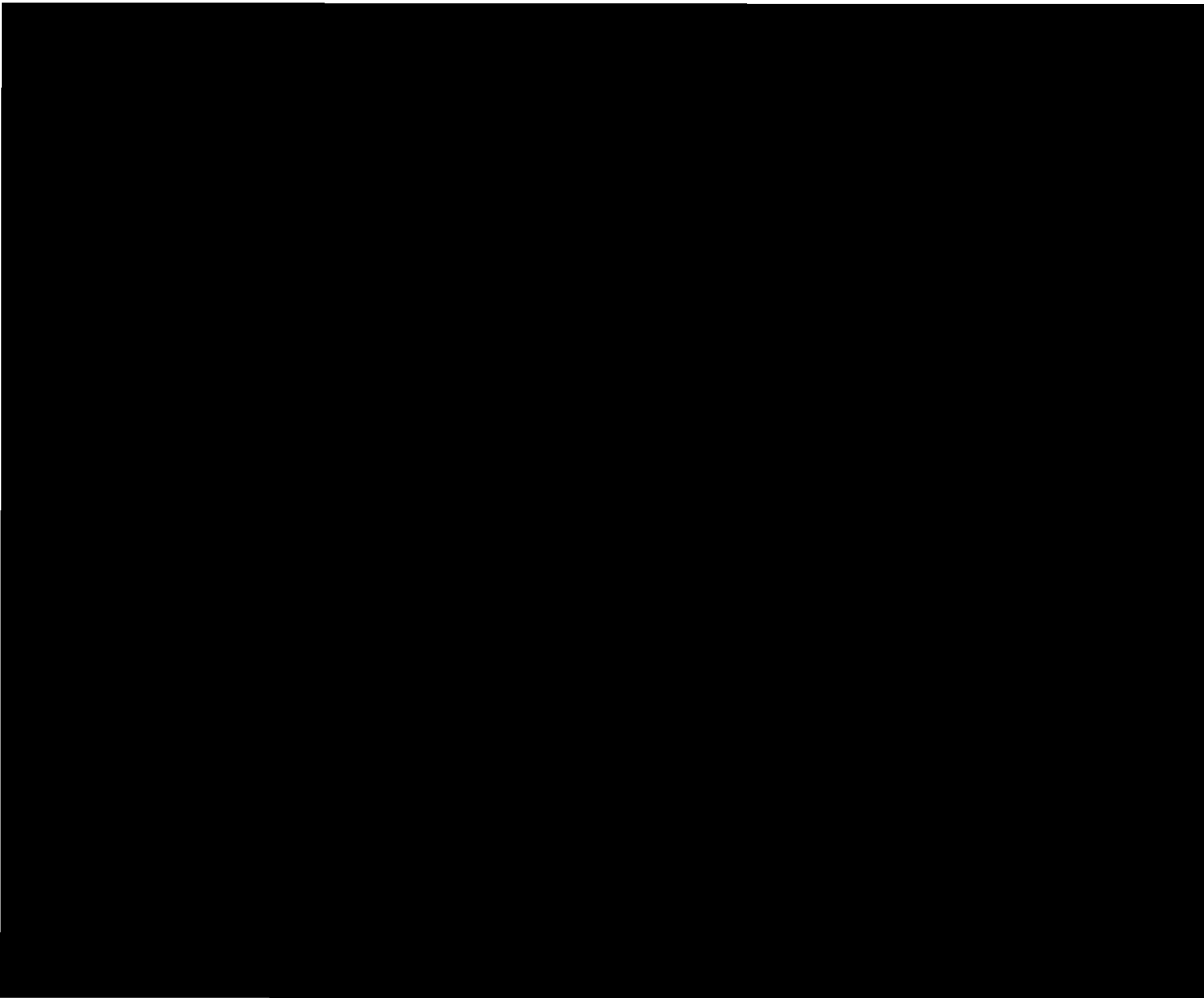
# VOLUNTARY STATEMENT CONT'D

I have read this statement consisting of \_\_\_\_\_ pages, each page of which may bear my signature and corrections if any, bear my initials and I certify that the facts contained herein are true to the best of my knowledge.



10/10/08

DATE



Enclosed is my account of the activities that took place at the time of a fatal balloon accident as part of the 2008 Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta.

Date: October 10, 2008

Time: 7:25 - 7:55 am.

My Aircraft: N16701F

Balloon Fiesta Registration: 822

The balloon fiesta was conducting a mass ascension of Special Shape balloons as a part of the balloon fiesta. The balloon fiesta held a pilot briefing on this date at approximately 6:15am. In this briefing housekeeping items were discussed, then a detailed weather briefing. Data locations were: Albuquerque International Airport, Double Eagle, observed weather from Balloon Fiesta Park. Surface winds were below 10kts. Winds aloft were expected to increase during the day.

Since I am there as a contract balloon, I felt an obligation to put the balloon into the air as part of the program. Prior to my flight, discussion with my ground crew was that I would plan to make a very short flight and terminate in the reservation to the north of balloon fiesta park. I

10/17/2008

left the ground at approximately 7:25 am. Once off the ground my flight path was taking me over the propane distribution point and beyond this was populated areas. My flight was not taking me to the desired location. I radioed my ground crew to let them know that would take a flight which would take me north and across the Rio Grande River.

My flight was over Rio Rancho an adjoining community to Albuquerque. During my flight I looked for the fastest layer of wind so that I could get to a suitable landing site before the surface winds came up. My flight altitude was approximately 6800'. My flight direction was north and west approximately heading 340-350. While flying over the community I saw other balloons (ride operations) landing within Rio Rancho. I could see that they were doing drag landings of approximately 20-30'. At this time, I briefed my passenger that it would likely be that our balloon flight would end in a drag landing. I prepared her for the worst. During this time I saw other balloons landing. All were dragging to a stop. The surface winds looked to be at a 80-90 degree heading.

As I was making some decisions on where to land, In front of me I noted a ride balloon approximately a mile away setting on the ground not affected by the high surface winds. I pointed this balloon out to my passenger and said that I would work to make that landing site.

My flight profile was staying high to obtain the north winds and once I was close to the other balloon, I would go into a steep decent making the right handed turn in the winds to come into the landing field. The location of this landing was located between the Santa Ana Casino and Jackalope which is located on highway 550 in Bernalillo, NM. This location was within a mile of the fatal accident.

I secured my balloon on the ground and almost immediately I started hearing sirens. This put a sick feeling into my stomach as I have heard sirens before racing to crash scenes. I told my passenger that I hoped that this was not an accident. After being on the ground for 3-5 minutes, I received a radio call from my wife. She in a very sad voice told me that she was a witness to a balloon crashing into power lines. She told me that she was stopped by the police and that she did not know when she would be able to move to recover my balloon.

It was at this point I saw black smoke rising into the air. Shortly thereafter I observed the Wings of Wind balloon shooting skyward enveloped in smoke and fire. The balloon tracked north and started descending making a turn to the east. I thought that it would come into the field that I was located in. At this point there was another explosion which caused the balloon to rise higher and it floated off to the north. It was approximately 7:45 - 7:50am.

Once the special shape balloons had left balloon fiesta park the competition would began at approximately 8:00 am, this was for the other 600+ registered balloons. I could not believe that the balloon fiesta officials had not cancelled their competition. The surface winds that would be encountered during the landing phase of the flight were obviously in excess of the FAA waiver.

It is my opinion that the officials of the balloon fiesta acted in a reckless manner in knowingly allowing balloons to fly when the surface winds were at a dangerous speed within the landing areas. It is further my opinion that the balloon fiesta officials knowingly caused the destruction of property and life. I am making these statements knowing that I am likely not going to be invited back to participate in the 2009 event.

Just one year ago there was a loss of life in an accident. Again, it is my opinion that the surface winds were predicted to increase during the hours of flight operations. At that time, I

was prepared to fly when the winds started thrashing my equipment on the ground. I made a decision to terminate my planned flight.

There seriously needs to be increased oversight and overhaul of the operations for the balloon fiesta. Pilots were issued aircraft radios programmed to listen to surface wind information. These sites were often down or incorrect information. I understand that this year the FAA mandated balloon tie off systems for participating balloons. I thought that this has always been in effect for ground operations at the balloon fiesta. Once a balloon leaves the ground, there needs to be a clear understanding of what the predicted wind conditions are upon the landing phase of the flight. The catch all statement made by balloon fiesta officials is that the pilot in command makes that decision. Full well knowing that with that statement it lets the balloon fiesta off the hook.

Each year I attend many other events. At the events a full weather briefings is conducted and with the good sense of the Balloonmeister (one who conducts the balloon operations) decides to cancel flying events with the knowledge of weather or wind being in excess of the FAA waiver.

Enclosed is raw video that I saw on YouTube which was being taped at the time of the accident. In the video you can see the ground speed of the balloons attempting landings. Click here to view: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2mvM9AVciVw>

Please help us in making balloon flights safer for the pilots, public and passengers. Two deaths within the past two years are not acceptable.

If you should have any questions I would be happy to help you with your investigation.

Thank you.

Max C. Mitchell

FAA Certificate: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
Champaign, Illinois 61822  
[REDACTED]

10/17/2008

**Personal Statement  
Of  
Hot Air Balloon Accident in  
Rio Rancho, New Mexico – Highway 528  
October 10, 2008**

**By  
Betsy D. Mitchell**

At approximately 7:50 a.m., I was driving our hot air balloon recovery vehicle north on Highway 528. In addition to me, there were three crew members in our van. We were chasing our hot air balloon, Felix the Cat, to assist with his landing.

We were observing that many of the balloons were moving faster and that their flight direction had changed from northwest to the east as they descended. Clearly the wind speed had increased substantially from when we had launched our balloon just 30 minutes earlier at 7:00am from Balloon Fiesta Park.

A police car came around me quickly with his lights and siren on. We all thought there had been a car accident at the bottom of the hill until we looked to our left where we all saw the tetrahedron balloon basket tangled in the power lines. Another police car came and traffic was halted. We were stopped on the highway only a few about 80 feet from the accident.

I did not see the balloon go into the power lines. When I first noticed the balloon, it was already in the power lines. The envelope, still full of hot air, was trying to continue its flight and break loose the basket from the power lines. This factor and the increased winds caused the basket to be thrashed about, up and down, and sideways.

In addition to all of this, a detached propane line was releasing liquid propane all through the air like an angry snake. No people could be seen on board the balloon at this point. Small arcs could be seen around the basket. Then a few seconds later, there was a small explosion on-board. Flames appeared in the basket. After a few more seconds, large flames completely engulfed the inside of the basket all the way up to the burner area. The envelope was not on fire.

I took a moment to radio to my husband, the pilot of Felix the Cat. I needed to relay to him that I was in traffic being halted due to a serious balloon accident about 80 feet from our chase vehicle. He informed me that he had landed safely in Bernalillo. At this point I also noticed that one of our crew members was snapping photographs from inside our van with her professional camera.



It was only a few more seconds after the flames had engulfed the entire basket when a charred body seemed to fling from the raging basket as it continued to be thrashed about in the wind, power lines, and the envelope trying to fly. This was a very, very gruesome scene. It did not appear that the person jumped from the basket. The body seemed unconscious or lifeless as it dropped from the basket.

The balloon basket then broke free from the power lines and began to fly. At first the balloon flew east just a few feet where it hovered for a moment over Highway 528. Burning debris and tanks fell from what remained of the burning basket. At this point, I was concerned for our crew's safety and that of the others who were halted in traffic under the burning balloon that was now flying without a pilot. Debris continued to fall from the balloon as it gained altitude and began drifting north.

North bound traffic was allowed to make a U-turn into the South bound lanes. Knowing there was nothing we could do at the scene of the accident we turned around. We proceeded to find another way to Bernalillo, so we could recover our balloon. Our crew was badly shaken from this horrific accident.

Everyone in our van was an experienced crew member. All had at least 10 or more years of crewing experience. Two crew members were from Albuquerque. Since 1980, I have crewed for private and professional balloon teams. We are from Champaign, Illinois and have participated in all but two Fiestas since 1980 as well as many other events throughout North America. Ballooning is a big part of our lives as a family sport.

I was profoundly saddened by this tragic accident today. Throughout witnessing this tragedy, all I wanted to do was help but there was nothing any of us could do. Balloonists are trained to not touch a balloon when it is in power lines and leave it to the experts. As a longtime balloonist, it was very difficult to witness this dreadful moment.