Caldwell County Hot Air Balloon Disaster
July 30th 2016

Martin Ritchey – Chief- EMC Caldwell County
Texas Emergency Management Conference 2017
“Smiley Face Balloon” over the City of Lockhart in Spring 2015
Federally Declared Flood Disaster
Memorial Day Weekend Flood 2015
Major Tank Battery Fire
Coordinating
Multi Agency Response

Texas Task Force I
Texas Task Force II
Texas A&M Forest Service
Texas Military Forces
TDEM
DPS
TXDOT
Caldwell County Sheriff’s Office
Caldwell County Unit Road
Alamo Area SAR*
Travis County SAR*
Austin PD SAR
TEXSAR*
Texas A&M Veterinary Team
Maxwell Volunteer Fire Department*
Chisholm Trail Fire Rescue*
San Marcos SMART Dive Team*
San Marcos Fire Marshal’s Office
And many many more…
August 13, 2015
May – October 2015

KBDI (Drought) Index
Burn Ban Lifted Oct 26th
Federally Declared Flood Disaster
All Saints Day Flood 2015
Federally Declared Flood Disaster
May/June 2016
Pilot’s Weather Report

• 1010:35 N2469L yeah I think once the sun (unintelligible) the winds are going to pick up
• 1010:38 WS042 yeah and those clouds may be a problem for you I don’t know how low you want to stay but
1010:45 N2469L um
• 1010:47 WS042 alright
• 1010:48 N2469L well we just fly in between them
1010:49 WS042 in between them
• 1010:52 N2469L we find a hole and we go hey thank you have a blessed day okay
Take off point to point of impact
Balloon Pre Flight
Taken from ground at 7:30
Image taken from Balloon 7:40 AM
7:42:20 AM

Time LCRA computers record trouble with transmission lines in Maxwell area.
Emergency Services Dispatched at 7:44 AM
Flight of separated balloon envelope
Initial Responders

Maxwell Community VFD

Caldwell County Sheriff

Caldwell County EMS
Additional Agencies Respond

- Caldwell County Emergency Management
- Caldwell County Justice of the Peace Precinct 1
- Texas Department of Public Safety
Office of Emergency Management

Notification of County Judge

Ordering initial EM response and closure of airspace.

Activation of Mass Fatality Plan

Accomplished while responding to scene.
Office of Emergency Management

- Scene Assessment
- Expansion of scene security
- Establishment of scene media area
Office of Emergency Management

- Set up County Communications Trailer & Command Post
- Establish Family Service Center (away from scene)
- Prepare scene for multiple operational periods
Deployed the Caldwell County Incident Command Post
Local Responsibility

Accounting for all victims (fatal and non fatal) is a local responsibility.

- Emergency Management
- Fire/EMS
- Law Enforcement
- Hospitals
- Medical Examiner/Justice of the Peace

With Assistance from:
- NTSB
- Carrier/Operator
- Other State & Fed Agencies

(source NTSB)
Extending perimeter
Establish JIC
Sheriff Daniel Law along with the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) is confirming the number of victims from the Caldwell County Balloon Incident is sixteen (16). The NTSB is leading the investigation along with the FAA and FBI.

The identification of the victims will be a long process according to the NTSB and the medical professionals. The investigation will carry on through the day and any new information will be provided as soon it becomes available.

Words cannot express how saddened we are by this tragedy and offer you our sympathy for your profound loss.

We would like to thank the citizens of Caldwell County and other agencies in Central Texas who reached out and assisted our emergency personal during this tragic incident.
Family Service Center

- Within hour of the indecent
  - Staffed by
    - Seton
    - Caldwell County SO Victims Assistance
    - Lockhart Victims Assistance
    - American Red Cross
    - Ebenezer Lutheran Church
    - NTSB (arrived day two)

- NO MEDIA WAS ALLOWED
World Wide Media Attention
Everyone is watching!
Social Media Fakes

Note the single pole for wires

Mountains in Central Texas?
Search, Detection and Recovery

• Responsibility of presiding medical examiner/JP
  – If possible coordinate with NTSB prior to the recovery of fatally-injured victims

• Recovery is a destructive process

• Documentation is essential
  – *In situ* position of human remains
  – Use of restraint systems
  – Manipulation of wreckage during recovery (accidental/intentional)

• Proper S&R Facilities victim ID by mitigating:
  – Additional Commingling
  – Destruction of evidence

Source NTSB
Federal, State and County
Hon. Sumwalt Jr. NTSB Board Member
National Weather Service

Provided continuous updates on a Spot Weather Forecast for the accident site.

Main weather impact near site will be the climbing heat indices through the afternoon with readings maxing out near 101-104 degrees. No showers or thunderstorms are expected to develop near the immediate site through the afternoon but some could develop across the coastal plains farther to the southeast. This activity will be monitored closely for any closer approach into Caldwell County. Winds will be around 10 to 15 MPH from the south/southeast.
Staging Mass Fatalities Supplies
Primary Objectives of a Mass Fatality Medicolegal Operation

• Investigate, recover and examine decedents in a dignified and respectful manner
• Accurately determine cause and manner of death
• Perform accurate and efficient identification of victims
• Provide rapid return of victims to their legal next of kin if possible
• Exchange factual and timely information with the families in a compassionate manner

Source NTSB
Removing Decedents
Critical Stress Incident Debrief

• Immediately after leaving the scene
  – Provided by Austin Fire Department
• Two separate CSID’s to take place following week (DPS)
  – One in daytime
  – One in the evening
• Regular conversations with team members
Gondola
FBI Processes the scene
Static line 30’ of abrasion
Damage to LCRA Transmission Tower
Removal of Incident Debris
Balloon Envelope & Burner Assembly
On Scene Temporary Memorial
Memorial Service
Memorial Service
“His Holiness Pope Francis was deeply saddened to learn of the tragic loss of life resulting from the hot air balloon crash in Lockhart, Texas, and he sends his condolences to the families of the victims. Upon all who grieve at this difficult time, Pope Francis invokes the divine gifts of strength and comfort”
Burned Bible Recovered
Hoax?

Saturday, July 30, 2016
33 42 52 61 74 96 142 | Hot air balloon crashes killing 16, July 30, 2016 news hoax reporting

Balloon carrying 16 crashes

No survivors; balloon caught fire over Lockhart, Texas

CNN affiliates: KXAN | TWN News | KSAT | KEYE
Meetings with Hearing Chairman
Pilot Certification – Part 61

Commercial Pilot with Lighter-than-air Category and Balloon Class Rating

• **Ground & Flight Training** in 11 Specific Areas of Operation

• **Aeronautical Experience**

• § 35 hours of flight time as a pilot, including at least:
  – 20 hours in balloons;
  – 10 *flights* in balloons;
  – 2 *flights* in balloons as the pilot in command; *and*
  – 10 hours of flight training including 10 training *flights*

• **No requirement for Medical Certificate**
NTSB Panel
Drug & Alcohol Reporting Requirements

14 CFR Part 61.15 - Requires certificate holders to report the following:

• Convictions of certain drug offenses or Motor vehicle actions (MVA) – i.e. conviction related to operation of a motor vehicle while under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

• To be reported to Civil Aviation Security Division (AMC-700) within 60 days after the action.
Pilot’s Record

• 1987 - Arrested twice, possession of drugs - Felony - Given 3 years of probation starting October 1987 - Completed drug counseling
• 1996 - Interfering with an arrest - Misdemeanor
• 1998 - Driving While Intoxicated (DWI) /Alcohol and possession of a controlled substance - Felony
• 1999 - Possession of a controlled substance - Felony
• 1999 - Distribution and delivery of manufactured substance - Convicted and sentenced for 10 years August 2002
• 2000 - DWI/Alcohol "persistent offender" - Sentenced to 1 year, guilty as of September 2002 - Incarcerated from October 2002 to April 2004
• 2007 - Leaving the scene of an accident and operating with suspended Driver’s License (DL)
• 2010 - DWI/Alcohol “aggravated offender” and driving with a revoked DL - DL revoked until 2020
## Pilot Medical Conditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medical Condition</th>
<th>Medication*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol dependence - remission</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High blood pressure</td>
<td>Losartan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elevated cholesterol</td>
<td>Simvastatin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diabetes – type 2</td>
<td>Insulin</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Metformin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Major depressive disorder</td>
<td>Bupropion</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fluoxetine</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attention deficit disorder</td>
<td>Methylphenidate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Insomnia</td>
<td>Zolpidem</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fibromyalgia</td>
<td>Cyclobenzaprine</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Piroxicam</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pregabalin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chronic back pain / spasm</td>
<td>Oxycodone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diazepam</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Information on Investigation

Hot Air Balloon Crash

Accident No: DCA16MA204
Accident Type: Office of Aviation Safety
Location: Lockhart, TX
Date: 7/30/2016

An NTSB investigation team is launching to the July 30, 2016, balloon accident in Lockhart, TX.

More information will be released as it becomes available.

Docket

2/9/2016 - Investigative Hearing

Contact: NTSB Public Affairs
Eric Weiss
(202) 314-6100
eric.weiss@ntsb.gov

Related Recommendations
Related Press Releases
- December 05, 2016
  NTSB Holds Investigative Hearing into Deadly Texas Balloon Accident
- November 17, 2016
  Fatal Hot Air Balloon Accident Subject of NTSB Investigative Hearing

Related Reports
Related Events
More NTSB Links
- Investigation Process
- Data & Stats
- Accident Reports
- Most Wanted List
Observed Needs

• Regulation of Commercial Balloon Pilots
• Electronic Manifesting System
• Legal mandate for financial responsibility
Tightening and strengthening safety regulations and oversight of "tour" hot air balloon pilots.

Created by P.M. on May 16, 2017

On July 30, 2016, fifteen passengers and a pilot took off for what they thought was the greatest adventure, a hot air balloon ride. All 16 lives were claimed that day and this was the worst hot air balloon aviation accident in American history. This pilot had a long history of multiple DUI's, suspended license until 2020, drug convictions and had a witches brew of drugs in his system. If antiquated FAA rules were brought up to date, this accident was totally avoidable (rules dating from the 1930's). Hot air balloon pilots are not required to be drug tested nor have medical exams as other tour operations. It is time for FAA to ensure passengers have the same benefit of safety oversight as passengers of helicopter and airline tour operations. Lives Matter!
Responding Agencies

- Maxwell VFD
- Caldwell County SO
- Lockhart Caldwell County EMS
- Caldwell County Emergency Management
- Justice of the Peace Pct. 1
- Department of Public Safety
- Ebenezer Lutheran Church
- Seton Incident Response Team
- National Transportation Safety Board
- Federal Aviation Administration
- Texas Search and Rescue (TEXSAR)
- Federal Bureau of Investigation
- Lower Colorado River Authority
- American Red Cross
- And many more...
Caldwell County Balloon Fatalities

Paige Brabson  23  San Antonio
Lorilee Brabson  48  San Antonio
Ross Chalk  60  Wimberley
Sandra Chalk  55  Wimberley
Laura Douglas  46  Victoria
Scott Douglas  47  Victoria
Holly Huckabee  50  Houston
John Gore  33  Mineral Wells
Stacee Gore  31  Mineral Wells
Tresse Neill  43  San Antonio
Brian Nell  45  San Antonio
Tresa Owens  54  Brookshire
Joe Owens  43  Brookshire
Sunday Rowan  34  San Antonio
Matt Rowan  34  San Antonio
Skip Nichols (pilot)  49  Kyle