

EVIDENCE:

Item 1 CDR of photographs taken by CSO Danford, and booked into the Southwest Station's Evidence room by Dep. Pendleton on 11/14/13.

DETAILS:

On 11/9/13 at approximately 0742 hours, I was dispatched to the area of [REDACTED], in the unincorporated area of Temecula, reference a hot air balloon that had caught fire and injured passengers.

Upon arrival at approximately 0749 hours, with Dep. Kennedy, I found the scene of occurrence was a dirt field directly between [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. Multiple people with burn injuries were both laying on the ground and standing up. A hot air balloon passenger-bucket was on the ground and the balloon was deflated behind it.

With Medical aid en route, Dep. Kennedy and I began to organize patients, witnesses and involved parties. Firefighter / Paramedics from CalFire Engines 96, 84 and 92 arrived and provided medical aid. American Medical Response Ambulances 407, 440, 425 and 473 also arrived and provided medical aid.

I asked several people who the pilot of the balloon was and Dominic Chemello came forward. Chemello had visible burns to both of his arms. I asked him what happened. Chemello stated after he had landed the balloon, he removed one of the "burners." He stated he believed something (I could not remember his terminology) must have been kicked while passengers off loaded, which caused propane to expel. This expelled propane then lit on fire.

I approached the hot air balloon basket and found William McCammet and Kyle Mighore folding the deflated balloon preparing to store it. McCammet and Mighore explained they were employees of Chemello and were putting the balloon away for him. I instructed them to leave it alone for now and had them exit the area. Dep. Bikul arrived and at my direction he secured the scene and began taking pictures. While doing this Dep. Bikul was contacted by the property owner at [REDACTED] where the balloon originally touched down. Refer to Dep. Bikul's supplemental report for further.

Deputy Kennedy proceeded to interview 2 witnesses who reported the incident, Charles and Teresa Jines. Deputy Kennedy also interviewed employees McCammet and Mighore, and passengers Diaz and Saucedo. Refer to his supplemental report for further.

Deputy Guittierez proceeded to interview uninjured passenger Gary Pergl. Refer to his supplemental report for further.

Injured passengers Lauren Fenner, Elaf Farahat and Nassid Farhat were transported to Inland Valley Medical Center. Dep. Leso responded to the hospital and interviewed them. Refer to his supplemental report for further.

Watch Commander Sgt. Jones arrived on scene and I briefed him on the incident.

Captain Castillo was the incident commander for Cal Fire and he advised his agency had notified the National Transportation Safety Board and the Federal Aviation Administration. I spoke with NTSB investigator Larry Lewis by phone. I advised Investigator Lewis my agency was gathering identifying information on all involved parties and witnesses statements. I told him I had deputies taking photographs of the balloon basket and equipment and asked what he would like to have done with it. Inv. Lewis advised I could release all equipment back to the business. After CSO Danford and Deputy Bikul had taken photographs they opened the incident scene and released all hot air balloon equipment back to McCammet and Mighore.

I learned from Cal Fire that of the injured parties, Chemello was transported to Arrowhead Regional Medical Center; Fenner, Farahat and Farhat were transported to Inland Regional Medical Center; Rosenfeld had been transported to Rancho Springs Medical Center; and Diaz was not transported.

Of the uninjured passengers Pergl and Saucedo were interviewed at the scene; I later contacted contacted Kutschka by phone; but Jason Quezada walked away before contacted and giving a statement. I was able to determined prior to him leaving his phone number was [REDACTED]

I cleared the scene as the last deputy at approximately 0921 hours and responded to Rancho Springs Medical Center to interview Nicole Rosenfeld. Rosenfeld had burns to her left arm and wrist. Rosenfeld stated she was a passenger and the balloon ride had preceded normal until they landed on private property. The pilot directed the men to exit the basket and the basket lifted off of the ground again while ground crew employees pulled the basket over a fence off of that person's property. Rosenfeld stated the basket touched down on the ground again. She was unsure if anyone else exited but saw the pilot turned a valve of an internal propane tank and she smelled propane. Rosenfeld said she had been on a prior balloon ride and thought this was odd. After a few seconds she felt a large amount of heat from above and the fire erupted. Rosenfeld said she fell to the ground, the pilot fell on top of her and she saw fire all around her. Rosenfeld said Jeffrey Kutscka assisted her out of the balloon and they ran away. Rosenfeld estimated the fire lasted for about 30 seconds.

I left the hospital and spoke with Jeffrey Kutscka by phone. Kutscka told me he was a passenger in the balloon ride, which was uneventful during the flight. He stated the balloon landed on a private person's property and the pilot instructed him and two other men to exit to lighten the basket. The ground crew employees then dragged the basket over this woman's fence into a dirt field where the fire flashed. Kutscka said there was no warning and he did not notice anything out of the ordinary. Kutscka believed the fire lasted about 10 seconds. Kutscka said a woman jumped out of the basket towards him and after helping her, he reached in and pulled Rosenfeld out of the basket. He stated he couldn't remember anything out of the ordinary that lead to the fire.

On 11/13/13 I contacted NTSB Inv. Lewis by phone and determined the NTSB investigation was assigned to Investigator Howard Plagens. I contacted him by phone and notified him of the status of our investigation. He advised he would take care of any further follow up investigation and only requested this report and photographs to be forwarded to him.

On 11/14/13 at approximately 1600 hours, I received digital photos from CSO Danford which I booked into evidence.

1 This investigation is closed and forwarded to the National Transportation and Safety Board for
2 follow up.

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4 **CASE STATUS:** EXC.