



Federal Aviation Administration

New Commercial Hot-Air Balloon Safety Program

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October 13—After a July 2016 balloon accident in Lockhart, TX that caused 16 fatalities, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) took proactive steps to increase the safety of hot-air balloon tourism. As the result of a year-long FAA “Call to Action” with the commercial hot-air balloon industry, the Balloon Federation of America (BFA) has developed an “Envelope of Safety” accreditation program for balloon ride operations.

Consumers can use the program to select a ride company or pilot that strives to reach a higher safety standard – a move the agency applauds.

To meet the BFA's program requirements, company pilots of balloons that are capable of carrying more than 4-6 passengers must be commercially certificated for 18 months, have a specified amount of flight experience, and hold an FAA second-class medical certificate. Pilots also must pass a drug and alcohol background check, have attended a BFA-sanctioned safety seminar within the last 12 months, and be enrolled in the FAA WINGS program. The BFA will verify this information annually, and will check the safety background of pilot applicants by researching FAA accident and incident data.

A second part of the program provides balloon ride operators with a choice of three levels of safety accreditation: Silver, Gold, or Platinum. While any size company can achieve the highest level, the tiered structure is designed with different size companies in mind. Each level has increasingly stringent safety requirements including:

- Meeting the pilot requirements
- Holding valid aircraft and commercial vehicle insurance
- Not exceeding a minimum specified number of accidents or incidents within a recent time period
- Verifying annual aircraft inspections
- Hosting a forum for passengers to rate the company
- Notifying local FAA offices of the location of their base of operations

- Executing and storing passenger liability waivers
- Conducting random pilot drug screening
- Developing written policies for crew safety.

The FAA believes the BFA program will enhance safety and professionalism, and will allow consumers to be better informed before they choose a commercial balloon ride operator.

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