



National Transportation Safety Board Aviation Accident Data Summary

Location:	Fort Carson, CO	Accident Number:	CEN15LA300
Date & Time:	07/02/2015, 0704 MDT	Registration:	N210GB
Aircraft:	BALONY KUBICEK SPOL BB60Z	Injuries:	2 Serious, 6 Minor
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General Aviation - Business - Sightseeing		

Analysis

The commercial pilot checked the weather before the air tour balloon flight. The Colorado Springs Municipal Airport (COS) automated weather system reported that the surface wind was 070 degrees at 7 mph. A National Weather Service meteorologist informed the pilot that a front north of Denver was expected to pass through Colorado Springs about 6 hours after the flight was going to take off. The pilot also attempted to contact Lockheed Martin Flight Service (LMFS) twice without success; LMFS reported that, on the morning of the accident, it experienced an abnormally high call volume, which resulted in long wait/hold times. About 15 minutes before taking off, the pilot released a pilot balloon (pibal) from the launch site to check the wind aloft. At first, the pibal drifted toward the west slowly. However, when it reached about 1,000 ft above ground level (agl), it appeared to drift back toward the launch site. The pilot reported that he also noticed a slight breeze blowing in a tall treetop located on a rise south of the launch site.

Before departure, the pilot rechecked the wind at COS, which was still 070 degrees at 7 mph. The balloon lifted off in calm wind conditions. However, as the flight continued, the balloon's groundspeed began to increase rapidly. About 22 minutes into the flight, a crew chief for another balloon company called the pilot and told him that COS was now reporting wind at 18 mph gusting to 26 mph. The pilot reported that he then began looking for a place to land and that, as he was doing this, the wind continued to increase to about 43 mph. The pilot located a large open field and set up for a high-wind landing, which involved descending to about 20 ft agl, at which point he intended to pull out the [parachute] top of the balloon envelope and make a steep, rapid descent to the ground. However, at 100 ft agl, the balloon encountered a drop in wind velocity from about 43 to 26 mph. The pilot had allowed the envelope to cool for the approach, which, along with the drop in wind velocity, caused the balloon's descent rate to increase rapidly. The pilot subsequently fully engaged the burners, but he was unable to arrest the descent, and the balloon impacted the ground hard. One passenger was ejected from the basket but was not injured. Two of the passengers remained in the basket but sustained serious injuries. Because the pilot had fully engaged the burners before it landed, the balloon lifted off again and ascended rapidly. The pilot regained control of the balloon, flew it to an open field, and subsequently conducted a controlled high-wind landing.

Flight Events

Enroute - Other weather encounter
Landing - Hard landing

Probable Cause

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be: The pilot's improper burner control, which allowed the balloon's envelope to cool, and the balloon's subsequent encounter with a drop in wind velocity during a high-wind landing approach, both of

which resulted in the balloon's descent rate increasing too rapidly for the pilot to arrest it and led to a hard landing.

Findings

Aircraft-Aircraft oper/perf/capability-Performance/control parameters-Descent rate-Not attained/maintained - C

Personnel issues-Task performance-Use of equip/info-Aircraft control-Pilot - C

Personnel issues-Task performance-Use of equip/info-Use of equip/system-Pilot - C

Environmental issues-Conditions/weather/phenomena-Wind-High wind-Effect on operation - C

Organizational issues-Support/oversight/monitoring-(general)-(general)-Meteorological service

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Commercial	Age:	70
Airplane Rating(s):	None	Instrument Rating(s):	None
Other Aircraft Rating(s):	Balloon	Instructor Rating(s):	None
Flight Time:	4128 hours (Total, all aircraft), 1100 hours (Total, this make and model), 4128 hours (Pilot In Command, all aircraft), 14 hours (Last 90 days, all aircraft), 6 hours (Last 30 days, all aircraft), 2 hours (Last 24 hours, all aircraft)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Manufacturer:	BALONY KUBICEK SPOL	Registration:	N210GB
Model/Series:	BB60Z	Engines:	
Operator:	High but Dry Balloons	Engine Manufacturer:	
Air Carrier Operating Certificate:	None	Engine Model/Series:	
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General Aviation - Business - Sightseeing		

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Observation Facility, Elevation:	FCS, 5874 ft msl	Weather Information Source:	Weather Observation Facility
Conditions at Accident Site:	Visual Conditions	Lowest Ceiling:	None
Condition of Light:	Day	Wind Speed/Gusts, Direction:	27 knots/ 38 knots, 10°
Temperature:	17° C / 14° C	Visibility	10 Miles
Precipitation and Obscuration:	No Obscuration; No Precipitation		
Departure Point:	Colorado Spring, CO	Destination:	Colorado Spring, CO

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	1 Minor	Aircraft Damage:	None
Passenger Injuries:	2 Serious, 5 Minor	Aircraft Fire:	None
Ground Injuries:	N/A	Aircraft Explosion:	None

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC): David C Bowling Adopted Date: 06/01/2016

Note: The NTSB did not travel to the scene of this accident.

Investigation Docket: <http://dms.nts.gov/pubdms/search/dockList.cfm?mKey=91522>

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