

TO ALL THOSE IN THE FESTIVALS AND EVENTS INDUSTRY,

As many of you are engaged with hot air ballooning operations, I write to you as a partner in this sport we all love and enjoy. Many of you have ballooning elements in your own events or simply understand the magic that balloons create and the smiles they bring at festivals and events around the world.

You are all aware by now that on Tuesday a terrible ballooning accident took place near Luxor, Egypt and 19 tourists lost their lives. This will be far and away the worst accident in the history of our sport.

The hot air balloon in this accident is well known to many of us in ballooning and was not one with a pristine history. Though of no consolation or benefit to those passengers who lost their lives or their loved ones in the Egyptian accident, in an attempt to prevent future accidents this is the time to remind any of you who travel and may fly in balloons as tourists, to please call us or your local partners in the ballooning side of the industry before you, your friends, family or neighbors fly and let us place you with/suggest a reliable company.

I would remind each of you that there are always circumstances beyond any measure of reason that seem to take place when these tragic events happen, but there is always a backstory that cause the domino's to fall as they do and that we must learn from.

What is important for all of us to note when accidents do occur in our business are the facts, as opposed to the speculation. It is still very early in the investigation process for this tragedy, but there are some facts starting to emerge.

FACT:

This was NOT a power line strike.

We believe that the pilot tossed out a drop line to his crew on the ground that somehow was wrapped around a fuel line before it was deployed. When the crew caught the line and pulled it tight, the hose ruptured, creating a stream of raw propane to be sprayed within the basket which, of course, created an immediate fire followed quickly by an explosion.

FACT:

As passengers and pilot were jumping from the balloon they were sealing the fate of those who remained on board. As you know, weight taken off the balloon will always cause the balloon to rise higher into the sky.

FACT:

Here in the United States where we base, we are lucky to have an effective government agency like the FAA (Federal Aviation Administration) who tasks operators with regular maintenance and pilot safety standards. Many nations around the world do not. Using previous YouTube videos as a gage, the balloon involved in the Egyptian accident appears to have been in ill repair and not in a proper condition to be flown in any type of operation, especially for flying passengers. There will likely be many investigations into the maintenance and repair approvals as the investigation moves forward.

Last Tuesday I celebrated the 43rd anniversary of my very first ride in a balloon. Like the large majority of those who pilot balloons in our industry, I have never injured a passenger, nor had a liability related claim of any kind. We're proud of our sport, its growth and its concern for safety in its operations and I hope that all of you will keep that safety record in mind when working with those in our niche of our common industry. Like airline flights, there are - quite literally - thousands of successful and memorable balloon flights made daily around the world that do not receive any media coverage.

My wife and partner, Laurie and I operate balloons for Coca-Cola and Walt Disney. We are currently in the middle of a tour with Disney and the new "Oz the Great & Powerful" movie which features a balloon prominently in the story line and

(certainly) the promotion of the movie. As part of that promotional tour we have been doing some unique and challenging flights that feature what we are most proud of, our precision operating skills.

Like our professional peers around the world, we take our obligation and responsibility to safety, to the companies we represent, and to your festivals and events, very seriously. Your trust in our sport of ballooning in general is our highest priority, as it is for those who manufacture the balloons that we fly.

Thankfully, all of our own partners comfortably understand that when Laurie or I say no to a flight, there is a pretty good reason for doing so. They never give us any push back and for that we are highly appreciative. It keeps our industry, events and passengers safe.

I know that I am singing to the choir when I am communicating with all of you who serve our industry so passionately around the world. Please help us to keep those who do not have as close of a relationship with ballooning informed and focused on the facts, safety record, and memories that we are able to produce every day, while sending our thoughts and condolences to those who lost their loved ones in the Egyptian tragedy.

With best regards,

Scott Spencer

President

Lighter Than Air America, Incorporated

Scott Spencer is the President and Director of Flight Operations for Lighter Than Air America, Incorporated. While operating on a global basis for their clients, Spencer and his wife/partner Laurie call Boise, Idaho their "Home Port". Currently, Spencer's companies own, operate and maintain balloons for some of the highest profile companies in North America including Coca-Cola, the Walt Disney Company and regional clients Peak Broadcasting and NBC affiliate KTVB Ch 7. They also produce the Spirit of Boise-Balloon Classic.