

Report by the Swiss Ballooning Association for 2011

CIA

A shadow was cast over the ballooning year in Switzerland because of a very serious incident with a gas balloon. Shortly after taking off for a ride to traverse the Alps, but already at significant altitude, the balloon rapidly lost gas and eventually crashed. One passenger was killed and the pilot was seriously hurt. At the time this report is written there are only speculations about the reason for the loss of gas. The Aircraft Accident Investigation Office of Switzerland is investigating, but results are not expected before sometime in 2012.

The number of pilots and balloons in Switzerland has stabilized at about 350 each, after we saw continuous reductions in the last 5 years by a total of about 100, both pilots and balloons. Two factors are worrisome. First, the ageing of the pilots. The largest group of pilot is between 60 and 70 years old. Second, the lack of newcomers. Reasons identified are different approach to spending time off, the increased demands on training to become a pilot and lastly the economy.

Another negative impact on the development of ballooning in Switzerland have the restrictive EASA rules. More rules, more requirements plus steeply increased fees are discouraging. Combined with new demands on the maintenance and technical requirements, costs for ballooning have become almost prohibitive. It has to be pointed out that many of these new regulations and requirements are exaggerated or even useless. The declared goal to increase safety cannot be achieved through these new rules.

The Swiss Ballooning Association would like to draw attention to some very negative experience in connection with the organizing of the Gordon Bennett Memorial 2012 in the Toggenburg Valley. The FAI-CIA is demanding compliance with regulations that may not even be legal, while at the same time is not providing support towards the organizing body or ballooning as a whole. The pressure on groups volunteering to organize international events cannot continuously be increased without valid reasons; else it will become increasingly difficult to find capable organizers that are willing to accept all the risks going with the effort.

The year 2011 did not only provide challenges, this report can be closed with a positive message from the Hot Air Ballooning division. At the European Championship of Hot Air Ballooning Stefan Zeberli triumphed the second time in a row. This supports the Swiss National Team for Hot Air Ballooning and proves that it is on the right track in its endeavor to create a team of strong competitors. And that loggers developed in Switzerland are now used in competitions around the globe also lifts the spirit.

Delegate of Switzerland

Jakob E. Burkard

Dezember 2011