

# At Least 16 Feared Dead in Texas Hot Air Balloon Accident

*Note: This story was updated at 10 a.m. ET Sunday.*

Texas Authorities and the Federal Aviation Administration described a scene Saturday morning in the heart of Central Texas farmland as a “significant loss of life” after a hot air balloon caught on fire and crashed into a pasture, the Associated Press reported.

During a brief press conference Saturday afternoon, National Transportation Safety Board Representative Erik Grosof would not provide the exact number of fatalities, but FAA Representative Lynn Lunsford said earlier Saturday that the balloon carried at least 16 people, none of whom survived. The death toll remained uncertain as of 2:30 p.m local time.

Reports say the Caldwell County Sherriff’s Office received a 911 call around 7:44 a.m. local about a “possible vehicle accident.” The basket portion of the balloon apparently caught fire and broke out during flight near Lockhart, about 30 miles south of Austin, Lunsford said.

The AP reported that NTSB spokesman Eric Weiss said that his agency knew very little else about the accident early Saturday afternoon, but that an NTSB team would arrive later in the day to investigate the crash. Lunsford told the AP that the FAA is also conducting an investigation.

The name of the company involved in the crash is Heart of Texas Hot Air Balloon Rides, an official with direct knowledge of the investigation told CNN’s Rene Marsh Saturday. CNN reported it was unable to reach anyone at the company for comment.

As of 2:30 p.m. local time, the AP reported that authorities have not released where the balloon was located out of or which company flew it. However, Caldwell County Sheriff Daniel C. Law told the AP that it was the “type of situation where people can walk up and buy a ticket,” unlike an airplane, which would have list of names.

Eyewitness Margaret Wiley, who lives a quarter mile from the crash site, was out walking her dog Saturday morning and told the AP that she heard a “pop, pop, pop.”

“I looked around and it was like a fireball going up,” said Wiley, who called 911. Wiley told the AP she frequently sees hot air balloons in the area, and that “the fireball was located under large power lines and almost high enough to reach the bottom of them.”

The land near the crash site is mainly farmland, with corn crops and grazing cattle.

In a released statement, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott asked that “all of Texas join us in praying for those lost.”{eoa}