

Activity report Royal Belgian Balloon Federation 2011-2012

The Royal Belgian Balloon Federation (Koninklijke Belgische Ballonvaart Federatie vzw / Fédération Royale d' Aérostation de Belgique asbl), referred to as Federation hereafter, assembles about 115 members. Members being balloon pilots (about 75 of which 11 with FAI sporting licence), observers, crew and other supporting/sponsoring members. The Federation is member organization of the Royal Belgian Aeroclub.

The Federation is involved in the organization of sporting, competition, educational and balloon promotion events. For sporting and competition several national Challenges are organized to prepare the Belgian Competition Team for national, low countries and international Championships. A Sports Commission (SC) is delegated by the Federation to organize the sport & competition events and to represent the Federation in the CIA/FAI organization.

The Federation is also the preferred spokesman with the Belgian Civil Aviation Authorities (BCAA) concerning flight and operational regulations for ballooning and peripheral activities (such as airworthiness maintenance programs, meeting safety, etc.).

The Federation follows closely the regulation changes in the European context (EASA NPA's & Opinions) and the transition to these new regulations by the BCAA. This year focus was on EASA Part-FCL and Part-MED for flight crew licensing. Processes for Part-M have been further fine-tuned between the pilot owners, maintenance organizations and the BCAA .

Our members are briefed about the BCAA and EASA evolutions through mailings, newsletter, seminars and a website.

In April 2011 the Federation has been faced with the first fatal incident with a hot air balloon in its existence. A pilot, member of the Federation dies, 2 passengers are seriously injured and 2 light injured when a hot air balloon lands in heavy and changing weather conditions. The Federation handles the communication with the public media and follows the investigation process with the Air Accident Investigation Unit of the BCAA. This spring the investigation report will be clarified to the other members during the yearly Safety Seminar.

In May 2011 a new protocol and policy tariff for ballooning has been negotiated between the Federation and the insurance company resulting in a significant discount. This is an important step to keep ballooning affordable. Members receive an additional discount provided they enlist to safety programs.

A seminar for members (March 2012) is prepared with several info and refresher sessions. Speakers from the BCAA, navigation and airspace specialists are attracted to provide training to our members. More than 90 members have registered for this seminar. Clarification of the mortal incident of April 2011 is part of the seminar's program. The airspace refresher, and the 'how to convert to the new European licensing model in the next 5 years' info exchange, are participation hits at this seminar.

After several years of a slightly decreasing membership, the Federation notices again a substantially growing number of members for 2012. While large amounts of information floats around on the internet, personal sharing of knowledge through an actively managed association regains interest by the ballooning community.

Council of the Belgian Balloon Federation, Brussels, March 2011