

Beat: News

3rd body found after hot air balloon crash in Virginia

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USPA News - Search teams in the U.S. state of Virginia have found the body of the last person who was aboard a hot air balloon that hit a power line and burst into flames before crashing in a heavily wooded area, police said on Sunday. Two bodies were previously recovered.

Virginia State Police spokeswoman Corinne Geller said the third body was discovered at about 11 a.m. local time on Sunday, about 4.5 hours after a search team comprised of more than 100 people had resumed their search. The remains were located about 100 yards (91 meters) north of where the second body was found on Saturday. "Now that the male pilot and two female passengers have all been located, this concludes the large-scale search efforts of the operation," Geller said. "Virginia State Police and National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) investigators are now concentrating on locating the balloon wreckage and evidence collection." The accident happened at about 7:56 p.m. local time on Friday when three hot air balloons took off from Meadow Event Park as part of a hot air balloon festival. Two of the balloons landed safely, but the third came in contact with a live utility line during its descent and caught fire. "Based on witness accounts, the pilot attempted to regain control of the balloon and manage the fire. At one point, the balloon's two passengers exited the basket," Geller said on Saturday. "Then witnesses recall hearing an explosion and the fire continued to spread. The gondola and the balloon then separated." Authorities have not yet confirmed the identities of the three victims, but the University of Richmond said Saturday that two members of its women's basketball staff were aboard the balloon. The school identified the women as Ginny Doyle, associate head women's basketball coach, and Natalie Lewis, director of basketball operations. Hot air balloon accidents are fairly uncommon, although deadly crashes have taken place in recent years. In February 2013, nineteen people were killed and two others were seriously injured when a hot air balloon caught fire and crashed near the city of Luxor in southern Egypt, making it the world's deadliest ballooning disaster in history. The second deadliest ballooning disaster in history occurred in August 1989 when two balloons collided over Australia's Northern Territory, causing one of the balloons to crash to the ground and killing all thirteen people on board. In a more recent accident, eleven people were killed in January 2012 when a hot air balloon hit wires on a power line and crashed in the Wellington Region on the North Island of New Zealand.

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