

What goes up must come down

Simple guidelines for balloonists to help them come back to Earth safely:

- > Although some lines are hard to see, look for a row of supporting poles or pylons to indicate the route, or it is sometimes possible to see shadows cast by the lines or the poles themselves.
- > Always carry binoculars so you can see clearly before getting too close.
- > Poles could be hidden behind trees and a 'tee off' line may come away at right angles across your intended landing field.
- > Whenever you make a landing approach or low-level pass, remember to keep a look out for overhead lines on your approach and avoid them if at all possible.

For hot air ballooning

Most injuries resulting from a power line collision occur, either through fire from burning propane or from a fall from a basket.

If a collision with power line occurs, shut down all fuel systems and if possible remain in the basket.

If the contact is made with two or more wires or a part of the balloon is touching the ground there will normally be a circuit and unless the lines trips out you will have a large electrical current flowing which could burn through the basket and flying wires, cylinders, fuel lines etc.

If a propane tank is punctured it is likely a fire will occur and you should attempt to throw the tank out.

Balloon fabric may be filled with electrically charged and very damp air making it a potential conductor under some circumstances. A high voltage power line can act as a plasma cutter and slice through plastic materials such as balloon fabric, balloon envelope metal flying wires, metal and rubber fuel hoses, metal fuel cylinders, metal basket frames and burner frames.

Emergency contact numbers

Network Operator Emergency contact number
Northern Ireland Electricity Ltd 0800 616 817

Network Operator Advice contact number
Northern Ireland Electricity Ltd 08457 643 643



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The Voice of the Networks



Energy Networks Association Safety Information for Balloonists

Vital energy, delivered safely

There are overhead power lines criss-crossing the country. Often unnoticed, they are essential to provide electricity to cities, towns, villages and rural communities. They carry voltages ranging from 230 volts (domestic voltage) up to 400,000 volts. Even domestic voltage can be fatal and high voltage electricity can jump large gaps.

The electricity network is designed to keep you safe, but people die each year due to accidental contact with overhead power lines, whilst others endure life changing injury with the lives of their families also suffering as a result.

The risk of danger can be considerably reduced by following some simple safety tips.



Staying safe

- > Any power lines, electricity substations or electrical equipment may be live and could kill you. Do not touch them, or any object or person that is in contact with them – even if you believe the power is off, it could be turned on again without warning.
- > Electricity can jump gaps so even getting too close to lines can be dangerous. Many objects can also conduct electricity such as trees, string, rope and water.
- > Rubber boots will not protect you and not all power lines are insulated.
- > Do not assume lines on wood poles are telephone lines – most overhead power lines are supported by poles.
- > If an overhead power line has fallen to the ground it may still be live, keep at least 5 metres away from the line or any object touching the line – the current can travel along the ground, through objects such as fences or metal objects and through water or other liquids. You do not need to touch the power line to be killed by it.
- > If you need to get clear, jump clear making leaping strides so that one foot is off the ground at all times until you are at least 5 metres away.

In an emergency

- > Call the emergency services on 999 or 112. Give them the most accurate location you can and ask them to inform the Network Operator.
- > Keep calm and under no circumstances attempt to disentangle any part of the balloon. Even if you think the power line may be dead, it can be switched back on at any time without warning.
- > Assume the lines/wires are live, even if they are not sparking.
- > Warn others on the ground to keep well away, especially if any of the power line is touching or is close to the ground.
- > If suspended from, or tangled in, wires, do not allow others to approach the balloon or basket until it is confirmed safe to do so by the Network Operator.
- > Do not attempt to leave the basket of the balloon unless there is real threat of fire.
- > If you must leave the basket jump clear and stay clear. Never allow a rope to touch the ground or any other structure. Instruct passengers to jump the last metre.
- > Never touch the balloon/ basket or any rope once you are on the ground.

- > The emergency services have been briefed on how to undertake rescues close to damaged overhead lines. An electrical engineer will confirm when the power has been turned off and the rescue can proceed safely.

Remember

It's not just the people inside the basket who may suffer. Depending on the importance of the line, many other people could be affected because the supply may have to be switched off to deal with the problem. These could include hospitals, businesses and schools as well as homes.

Top tips

1. Do not touch or get close to power lines.
2. Keep at least 5 metres away from fallen or damaged power lines or any object touching the line, AND
3. Contact the emergency services and the Network Operator immediately.

Advice for balloonists

Did you know

Most charts and maps used by balloonists show major transmission lines, but they do not show many high and low voltage lines which are often mounted on wooden poles. These can be difficult to spot on a sunny day and that can sometimes lead to accidents and injuries.

Keep a careful look out for overhead electric power lines.

KEEP WELL AWAY.

Think ahead

Before you take off

- > Make sure you know where overhead lines are in the vicinity of your departure location.
- > The CAA 1:500,000 air chart and Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 maps show the major transmission lines, because of their height but does not show other high and low voltage overhead lines - notably those on wooden poles which are more difficult to see from the air.
- > Always carry a mobile telephone when you fly so you can call the emergency services if you have to land in an emergency.