

Hot air balloon crash in Hunter Valley leaves nine injured



Photo: A hot air balloon was operated by Balloon Safaris. (Facebook: Balloon Safaris)

Nine people have been injured after a hot air balloon crashed after hitting a tree while trying to land at Pokolbin in the New South Wales Hunter Valley.

The aircraft, operated by Balloon Safaris, came down on McDonalds Road about 8:00am.

It was the company's second crash this year — in January four people were taken to hospital after one of their balloons had a "rough landing" near Cessnock, also in the Hunter Valley.

Two people were transferred to Newcastle's John Hunter Hospital with suspected spinal injuries. They are in a stable condition.

Paramedics said seven people have been taken to Cessnock Hospital in a stable condition with suspected broken bones.

Police have started investigating the circumstances surrounding the incident, and the Australian Transport Safety Bureau has been notified.

Three balloons were in the air before the incident, each with 20 passengers on board, plus a pilot.

Damian Crock, from the Professional Ballooning Association of Australia, has been in contact with the operator and said the incident was regrettable.

"Two balloons have landed without incident and the third balloon ... as it's heading towards its landing site, [has] come into contact with a tree.

Mr Crock said it appeared that the pilot had descended "faster than he would have liked to be descending" and had then experienced "a hard landing on the ground".

"It's certainly a regrettable incident and people have been injured, so we can definitely confirm that, but their injuries are not life threatening," he said.

Balloon Safaris is owned by Balloon Aloft, which describes itself as Australia's most experienced hot air ballooning company.

Extracted from:

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