



## AIRCRAFT OWNERS AND PILOTS ASSOCIATION

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April 1, 2005

Mr. Ronald X. Ruggeri  
Manager  
Airspace and Operations Support Branch, AGL-520  
Federal Aviation Administration  
1 Aviation Plaza  
Jamaica, New York 11434

RE: FAA Airspace Case Number 05-ASO-0003-NR

Dear Mr. Ruggeri:

The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA), representing over 400,000 general aviation pilots, has serious concerns with the safety of flight impacts associated with the moored balloon operating at 4,500 feet above mean sea level (msl) located near Barnwell County Airport in Aiken, South Carolina.

The moored balloon will extend 2,400 feet above the maximum elevation figure (MEF) for the quadrangle in which it is located. If a pilot is flying en-route at a visual flight rules (VFR) altitude of 3,500ft msl, 900ft above the MEF for that area, the moored balloon extended to 4,500 feet msl creates a serious collision hazard.

AOPA recognizes the lit moored balloon operating at 4,200 feet Above Ground Level (AGL) will only be operating during the day and a Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) will be issued prior to operation. However, the Flight Service Station (FSS) specialist will brief the NOTAM only when a pilot specifically requests such information. This will create an unsafe condition for pilots who do not typically request NOTAMs for moored balloons and pilots who do not anticipate encountering obstructions 4,300 feet above ground level in South Carolina where the average ground elevation is less than 300 feet MSL. Clearly, there are safety issues that have not been addressed prior to the moored balloon study commencing.

AOPA appreciates the opportunity to comment on moored balloon studies. However, we contend that a moored balloon at 4,200 feet agl will have an affect on VFR operations and should have been circularized well in advance of the period of operation. Additional time is necessary for users to adequately comment on potential impacts created by moored balloons before studies can commence. Similar to previously circularized studies in Pennsylvania (03-AEA-0044-NR) and New York City (04-AEA-0030-NR), this

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circular was post marked the same day the launch of the actual moored balloon was authorized to begin. We are concerned that receiving comments after the fact does not solve safety issues created by the moored balloon and could result in compromising the safety of many pilots operating in the airspace near the South Carolina – Georgia border.

AOPA anticipates prompt action by the FAA to mitigate the safety impacts associated with this moored balloon and stands ready to assist in any way necessary.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ryan M. Kahl', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Ryan M. Kahl  
Government Analyst  
Air Traffic, Regulatory & Certification Policy