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Press Release

RTE, ERDF and Fédération Française d'Aérostation are committed to preventing aerostat accidents near electrical lines

Mr Thierry Villey-Desmeserets, President of the Fédération Française d'Aérostation (FFA), Mr Hervé Laffaye, Assistant Managing Director of Réseau de Transport d'Electricité (RTE) and Mr Pierre Raimbault, Health & Safety Manager of Electricité Réseau Distribution de France (ERDF) have signed a three-year partnership agreement with Aéroclub de France aimed at raising awareness among ballooning and airship enthusiasts of the risks involved in this type of activity close to electrical lines.

This agreement follows on from partnerships already in place between FFA clubs, RTE et ERDF.

Overhead power lines are part of the landscape and we all tend to forget they are there. And yet, they present a risk of electrocution when one gets too close to them because an electric arc can form, even without making direct contact with the line.

RTE and ERDF already conduct media campaigns on the safety measures one should observe when engaged in outdoor sports close to their networks. And yet, despite warnings and recommendations, people engaged in such activities are victims of accidents every year. FFA, RTE and ERDF intend to cooperate even more closely in preventing any electrocution or electrification of humans.

This partnership agreement is organized around three main goals:

- FFA, RTE and ERDF undertake to identify high-risk areas and put in place suitable signs,
- RTE and ERDF provide awareness-raising documents to raise the level of safety of people engaged in outdoor sports close to electrical lines; FFA puts these documents at the disposal of its members,
- FFA, ERDF and RTE also undertake to design modules on the awareness of electrical hazards that will be included in FFA training courses. RTE and ERDF will identify local representatives among their staff who will be able to take part in such training courses.

In any event, the following advice regarding aerostats should be heeded:

- Before taking off, analyse and make a note of any risk of your flight plan intersecting with power lines,
- Include visual search for power lines in your piloting cycle,
- Ask your club for advice,
- Check wind direction and adjust safe distances according to your airspeed.

These tips, some examples and instructional leaflets are available on the following Internet site:

<http://www.sousleslignes-prudence.fr>

FFA (Fédération Française d'Aérostation), formed in 1977, has around 1000 members, including sixty or so associations nationwide as well as individual members (hot air balloon, gas balloon and airship pilots). The purpose of the federation is to ensure anyone can do physical and sporting aerostat activities. Forty or so events are organized every year across the country; these are listed on the federation's calendar, which can be viewed on the FFA site (<http://www.ffaerostation.org/>).

RTE is the operator of the French power transmission network. A public service company, its remit is to operate, maintain and develop the high-voltage and very high-voltage network. It is accountable for the working order and security of the electric system.

RTE routes electricity from French and European electricity suppliers to consumers, whether they are distributors (ERDF and local distribution companies) or industrialists directly connected to the transmission network.

With 100,000 km of lines of between 63,000 and 400,000 volts and 45 cross-border lines, the RTE grid managed by RTE is the largest in Europe. RTE generated turnover of €4,130 million in 2009 and has a workforce of around 8500.

ERDF – Électricité Réseau Distribution France, formed on 1 January 2008, a wholly-owned subsidiary of the EDF group, manages electricity distribution networks across 95% of metropolitan France. The company, with a workforce of 35,000, operates, develops and maintains 1,274,600 km of electric lines serving 33 million customers. In this capacity it carries out numerous operations on this network such as connections, entries into service, repairs and changes of supplier.

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