

# Up, up, but not away



An Amerquest blimp is lifted by weather conditions as a JetBlue plane takes off at Long Beach Airport Monday morning. Fire trucks and emergency vehicles surround the base of the blimp, which is tethered. No one was injured. Steven Georges / Press-Telegram

## Aviation: Tethered Amerquest blimp gets an unexpected lift from temperature.

By Felix Sanchez  
Staff writer

A new Amerquest blimp made like the Pillsbury Doughboy Monday morning and started to rise uncontrollably when it apparently was hit by a blast of warm temperatures at Long Beach Airport.

The unusual happening made for an equally unusual sight: The colorful "Soaring Dreams" blimp went nearly vertical but didn't float away because it remained tied to its mooring from the front.

Long Beach Fire Department personnel responded, and after they were told what likely happened, they started gushing cool water onto the blimp near its helium tanks. Within 10 minutes the blimp had floated down to its normal position.

No one was inside the airship, and no one was injured.

"We threw some water on it to cool it

down. It compresses the gas back," said Fire Department spokesman Capt. Jim Arvizu.

The blimp had risen to about a 60- to 65-degree angle. It remained tethered to its mooring pole, however. The pole and tethering style used for blimps at the airport allows an airship to swing around when hit by winds.

Gusty winds hit the area late last week, but it was unknown if that was a contributing cause. When moored, blimps carry only enough helium to keep them off the ground. Cool temperatures help reduce helium's lifting power.

But the helium that was inside the

blimp and helium tanks was affected by a combination of weather conditions, including temperature and barometric pressure, causing it to rise, Arvizu said he was told.

Weather authorities said the temperatures ranged from 52 degrees at about 5 a.m. to 61 degrees at 9 a.m., about the time the airship began to rise, and up to 68 degrees at about 11 a.m.

"That's the first time I've seen something like that since I've been here. It was even more captivating because it has such an unusual design," said

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## BLIMP: Airborne public art display

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Sharon Diggs-Jackson, an airport spokeswoman.

The Amerquest blimp, billed as the world's largest airborne public art display, was finished recently at MacArthur Air Force base in Tustin and was debuted at Dodgers Stadium last week for the Freeway Series with the Angels.

Part of the Amerquest Soaring Dreams program, the airship's colorful exterior design was created on 75,000 square feet of tarp to make a

40,000-square-foot canvas that was painted by more than 6,000 Southern California children and measures five times the size of the Sistine Chapel ceiling.

It is traveling across the United States as a symbol of children's hopes and accomplishments.

Long Beach Airport is used by a number of blimps as a home base when visiting Southern California for promotions or sporting events. Past visitors have included the 60-year blimp, Saturn blimp, MetLife Snoopy and others.