



BALLOON DEBRIS: A RISING CONCERN

Balloons are unique among all the man-made litter and debris found in the ocean and on the land because people purchase helium-filled balloons with the intent of releasing them into the environment. Too many people still participate in balloon releases because they do not make the connection that when balloons go up they come back to Earth as potentially harmful litter.



Christina Trapani



While all marine debris has some potential to harm wildlife, balloons have been identified as among the five deadliest types of debris due to the risk they pose to marine wildlife.

Graphic at left - More than 270 experts in marine debris, were asked by the Ocean Conservancy to rank the severity of impacts of marine debris on seabirds, sea turtles and marine mammals. Balloons were ranked number three due to the likelihood of entanglement or ingestion by marine life.

Clean Virginia - Waterways

TYPES OF BALLOON LITTER



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BY THE NUMBERS



LATEX BALLOONS

Are made with the sap from a rubber tree. During the manufacturing process many chemicals are added to raw rubber including pigments, oils, curing agents and accelerators. While natural latex balloons are considered biodegradable by some, it has been argued that latex balloons may take several months to several years to biodegrade. According to the study, "Balloon Litter on Virginia's Remote Beaches," 56% of all littered balloons recorded were latex.

FOIL BALLOONS

Often incorrectly referred to as Mylar balloons. "Mylar" is actually a brand name for a special type of polyester film. Foil or metallic balloons are made of plastic (nylon) sheets coated with polyethylene and metallic materials that are sealed together with heat. Experience shows that these metallic inks and paints flake off when exposed to environmental factors leaving a clear plastic balloon. Over time, foil balloons break up into smaller pieces but are not biodegradable.

ATTACHMENTS

Helium-filled balloons often have plastic ribbons and other items attached such as plastic valves, tie-off discs, and clips. It is also common to find plastic ribbons that have become separated from balloons.

In 2016-2019, volunteers participating in the International Coastal Cleanup reported more than 29,800 littered balloons in Mid-Atlantic states—New York, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland and Virginia. Of these, 15,076 balloons were found in New York, 6,626 were found in New Jersey, and Virginia volunteers found 4,154 balloons. Data reveal that in Virginia most of the balloon litter is found on its beaches, demonstrating that balloon litter accumulates in some coastal environments. A 5-year (2013-2017) monitoring project on remote islands of Virginia documented 11,441 pieces of balloon litter—up to 272 pieces per mile of beach.



Balloons Cause Power Outages



How do balloons impact power?

When foil balloons with metallic paints (sometimes referred to as “Mylar balloons”) come into contact with an overhead power line, the result is a loss of power. These balloons cause hundreds of power outages every year--impacting families, schools, restaurants, businesses and hospitals. One study found up to 20% of power outages are caused by balloons! (citation here).

Sometimes the ribbons attached to balloons also have metallic paint -- and can also spark a power outage.

Where do power outages occur due to balloons?

Anywhere you have power lines and people releasing balloons, communities can experience power outages. According to one employee of a utility company, balloons released on Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, Easter, graduations and at weddings bring outages, “almost without fail”.

According to Dominion Power in Virginia, power outages caused by balloons impact tens of thousands of customers. One power outage in Virginia in April 2015 left

BALLOONS + POWER LINES = OUTAGES!

14,600 families without power in XXXX, Virginia

650 power outages in 1 year in southern California

63 power outages in 2018 in Arizona

83 power outages in 2019 affecting **63,000** costumers

510 power outages in 1 year in Los Angeles, CA

14,600 families without power. Southern California Edison reported more than 650 power outages in one year caused by balloons. The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP), reported more than 510 outages caused by metallic balloons in just one year. In Arizona, in 2018 more than 63 outages were caused by “Mylar” balloons according to the Arizona Public Service Company (APS) and in 2019, they had 83 outages involving 63,000 customers.

Don't Release Balloons! There Are So Many POWERFUL, Uplifting, Litter-free Alternatives!

There are many inspirational, colorful, and litter-free ways to celebrate, to remember, and to honor the people who impact our lives. Due to potential injury, firefighter associations, electrical providers, local governments, public-safety groups, and wildlife conservation

organizations have all supported educational campaigns and laws that would reduce balloon releases.

Power outages from balloons are preventable – have a wonderful event, while NOT releasing balloons!



Raise the level of excitement with noise makers **to celebrate** at parties, at outdoor sporting events, weddings and other joyful events.

Hold a beach, park or waterway cleanup in a place you visited and enjoyed **to remember** a loved-one or **to honor** a person or group that impacted your life. Invite the press to attend to draw attention to the event.

Walk through waving ribbons wand in your wedding colors.

Add bells for a joyful noise. Easy to make as a delightful pre-wedding activity with your family and friends. Go to JoyfulSendoff.org for more ideas.

A candlelight vigil **to remember** a loved one is a beautiful healing event.

Joyful, picture-perfect ideas for weddings and other celebratory events.

People of all ages love blowing bubbles. Release bubbles **to celebrate, to honor** or **to remember**. As they rise, they lift your prayers, love, and spirits.

Yarn or paper pom-poms are a great way for guests **to celebrate**. Cheerfully wish a child or an adult a happy birthday, or a happy retirement. Create pompoms in your favorite sport team colors. Pompoms help create colorful and fun pictures.

Create a colorful wildlife garden with native plants that will attract butterflies and birds. **To remember** a life, support life.

Expressive ways to come together as a community to say thank you.

Plant a tree in your yard, or with approval in a park or place special to your loved **to remember** them. Add a plaque with a special message.

Contribute to the placement of benches, plaques, bricks, or other permanent memorial **to remember** loved-ones.

Use glowsticks, signs, noise makers **to honor** essential workers and first responders in your community.

Plant a native tree **to celebrate** the birth of a child in your yard, a family member's

yard, or sponsor a tree at a restoration planting nearby. Take a picture of the child with the tree every year to show how they grow and reach new heights together.

Uplifting ideas for memorials for loved ones.

Throw colorful beach balls into the air **to celebrate**, or toss to one another. Add more fun by putting hints on them for others to guess who tossed the ball.

Let paper airplanes fly **to celebrate and to honor**. Have guests write their well wishes on the airplane wings to save in your party scrap-book.



Prevent Balloon Litter.org
Inspirational, colorful, litter-free ideas to celebrate, to remember and to honor the people who impact our lives.



Fact sheet produced by the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program at VA Dept of Environmental Quality and Virginia Clean Waterways through grants from the Office for Coastal Management at NOAA. Visit PreventBalloonLitter.org for a complete list of partners committed to help monitor and reduce balloon litter through research, education, clean-ups and/or other programming.