

MBNMS Sanctuary Advisory Council Balloon Marine Debris

How big of a problem is the release of balloons ??

From 2008 to 2016, the Ocean Conservancy International Coastal Cleanup collected 630,000 balloons worldwide and of that amount 280,000 in the United States.

The US National Weather Service alone reports that they release over 75,000 latex weather balloons (and instrument boxes) annually in the US and its territories, with only a small percentage of recovery.

Over a 3 day period in 2018 (after Mother's Day), the non-profit organization Marine Life Studies, collected over 100 balloons during their routine marine mammal surveys in Monterey Bay.

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Why do people release balloons into the environment ??

A national media survey found that primary reasons for balloon releases were Memorials (60%) Awareness-raising events (30%), and Celebrations (15%)

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If a balloon is released, how far will it travel ??

Balloons are documented as traveling 5,300 miles from the point of release as evidenced by the recovery of a balloon in Los Angeles 49 hours after being released during the 1998 Olympics Opening Ceremony in Nagano Japan.

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What are balloons made of ????

Foil/metallic balloons are made of plastic sheets coated with polyethylene and metallic materials.

“Mylar” is a specific brand name for a specific type of plastic/polyethylene film.

Helium-filled balloons (of all types) are typical sold with plastic tethering ribbons, plastic valves tie-off discs and clips.

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Aren't Latex balloons "biodegradable" ????

According to the International Balloon Association's research, a latex balloon will decompose at the same rate as an oak leaf.

A study published in the scientific journal "Soil Biology and Biochemistry" found that it takes generally 4 years for oak leaves to fully degrade. Plenty of time to be ingested or to entangle marine life.

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What harm is caused by balloons found in the marine environment ??

Balloons and their fragments that end up in the marine environment are mistaken for food by marine animals or the string/ribbon wraps around fins flippers, and limbs leading to starvation, infection, amputation, and drowning.

A 2006-2011 Queensland study of stranded sea turtles found that of the 41 pieces of rubber eaten by the turtle, 32 pieces (78%) were balloon fragments.

The Ocean Conservancy surveyed 270 marine debris experts and found that balloon marine debris ranked 3rd in the severity of impacts on seabirds, turtles, and marine mammals from ingestion and entanglement. (Fishing gear and plastic bags and utensils were ranked 1st and 2nd)

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What is NOAA's role addressing marine debris ??

The US Congress passed the “Save Our Seas Act of 2018” which expanded NOAA’s Marine Debris Program to include “work to develop outreach and education strategies..... to address sources of marine debris;” and “promote international action, as appropriate, to reduce the incidence of marine debris, including providing technical assistance to expand waste management systems internationally;”

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What is the current law in California as it relates to releasing balloons into the environment ???

Existing California law only prohibits the release of balloons and tethering made from “electrically conductive” materials.

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What Are We Going to Do About Balloon Marine
Debris ??

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Balloon Marine Debris Resolution Suggested Actions

Support for a nationwide prohibition on the release of **ALL** helium-filled balloons into the environment;

Support the phaseout of the manufacture, distribution, and sale of helium-filled plastic and latex balloons, to be replaced with balloons manufactured with materials that do not pose environment risks;

Support an international effort to develop strategies and methods for recovering weather balloons and a plan for converting weather balloons to materials that do not pose a risk to the environment;

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Balloon Marine Debris Resolution Suggested Actions (Continued)

Support the development of educational materials that highlight and explain the adverse environmental consequences of releasing helium-filled balloon and identify and promote environmentally benign alternative methods of celebrating events;

Support development of strategies for the distribution of educational materials and conducting outreach to schools, colleges, churches, wedding planners, funeral homes, resorts, non-profit organizations, governmental agencies, decision makers, balloon manufacturers, distributor and retailers, and the general public.

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Questions/Comments ??? Let's Discuss.....