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APPENDIX 5

[Menu](#)[\(L\)](#)[News \(/news/\)](/news/)[All News](#)[Advertising](#)

Ban for sky lanterns in Black Country and Staffordshire

[Sandwell \(/news/local-hubs/sandwell/\)](/news/local-hubs/sandwell/) | [News \(/news/\)](/news/) | Published: Jan 13, 2015

A ban on Chinese lanterns will cover parts of the Black Country and Staffordshire as councils look to crack down on devastating fires caused by the controversial contraptions.

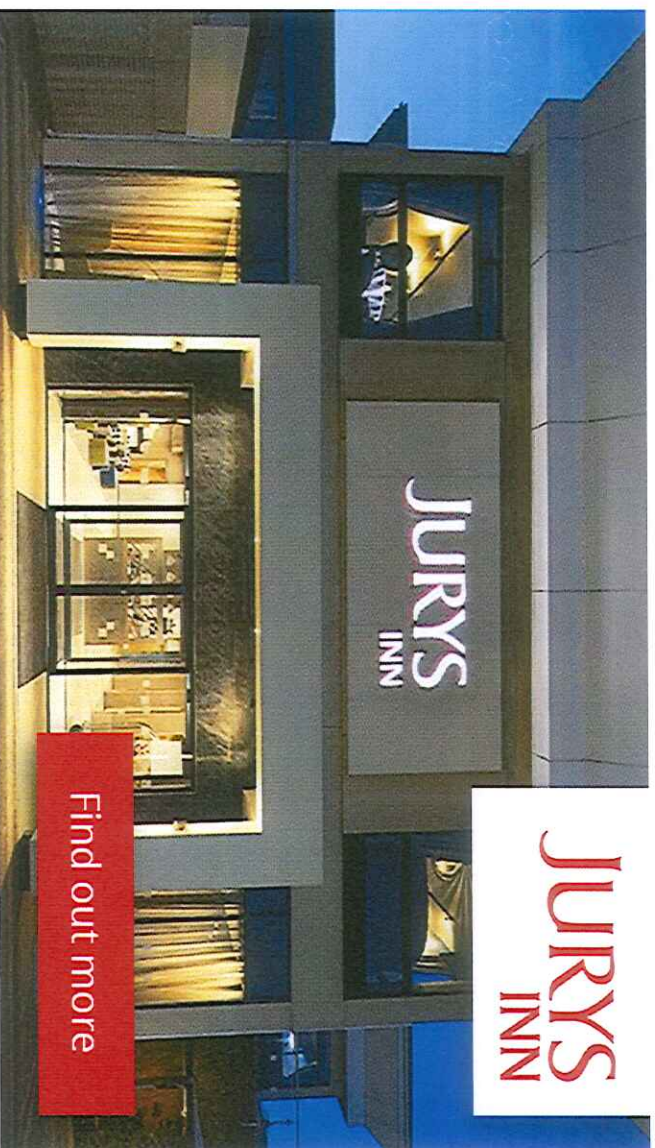


The paper devices, which use the heat of a small flame to take off into the night's sky, caused £6 million of damage at Smethwick's Jayplas recycling plant in 2013 - one of the biggest fires to hit the West Midlands.

They have become hugely popular over recent years, particularly at weddings, new years celebrations, vigils and other public and private events.

Staffordshire County Council has already taken the move to ban the paper-framed lanterns on council property. A special clause will now be inserted into all leases and licences preventing the use of the lanterns.

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And now Wolverhampton City Council is to discuss the possibility of restricting the use of sky lanterns at marriage venues and on council property across the city, as well as council organised events.

As well as the fire risk, they also can be harmful to animals and devastating for farmers.

Councillor Roger Lawrence, leader of Wolverhampton City Council, said: "A lot of people have raised their concerns about the health and safety risks sky lanterns carry.

"We are doing what a lot of councils have already done, including Staffordshire Council in recent weeks.

"We have looked at trying to introduce a bylaw which would prohibit them all together but those can usually take some time, so we are taking steps to ensure we do all we can to stop them being used on our property and at events we put together.

"I think there is a feeling growing all over the country that people want these lanterns banned because of the dangers they can pose.

"There is all sorts of risks not only to peoples property but to wildlife and nature.

"I know people like the pretty lights but I don't think anyone would want a sky lantern landing on their property and causing any amount of damage."

Sandwell Council has passed a motion calling for the lanterns to be banned by the Government.

Advertising

Leader councillor Darren Cooper said: "I support what Wolverhampton City Council is proposing and what Staffordshire has done. After the devastating fire in Smethwick we, as a council, passed a resolution calling for Chinese lanterns to be banned. We need the government to put a ban on the lanterns because as councils we can pass a by-law banning them on property but it is virtually impossible to enforce - it needs action higher up.

Wolverhampton City Council also say they will look to lobby the ban with the Government and seek to put restrictions in place on a national level.

A host of organisations, including the Chief Fire Officers Association, National Farmers Union, Women's Farmers Union, Marine Conservation Society, Country Land Owners Association, RSPCA and RSPB are backing the idea.

German zoo fire: Mum and daughters who set off sky lanterns questioned by police

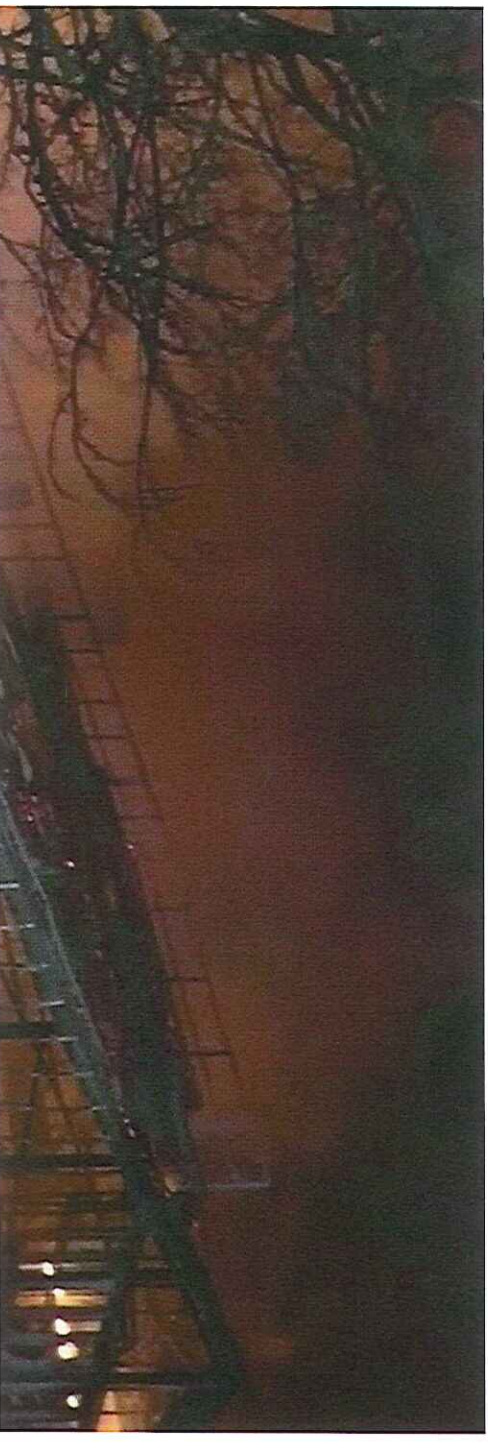
Dozens of animals died, including five orangutans, two gorillas, a chimpanzee and several monkeys.



Tania Snuggs

News reporter @news_snuggsy

① Thursday 2 January 2020 15:24, UK



More than 30 animals died after a fire broke out early on New Year's Day



Why you can trust Sky News

A mother and her two daughters are under investigation in Germany for launching paper sky lanterns which police believe may be to blame for a fire at a zoo that killed more than 30 animals.

The women - aged between 30 and 60 - went to a police station in the western city of Krefeld on 1 January after authorities held a news conference about the blaze, which **Krefeld Zoo** said left "highly endangered species" dead.

Police chief Gerd Hoppmann described the women as "completely normal people who seemed very sensible, very responsible" - and added that it was "very courageous" of them to come forward, saving authorities a tricky investigation.



Firefighters observe a burned monkey house at Krefeld Zoo

Mr Hoppmann explained that the women ordered five sky lanterns on the internet and told authorities they believed they were legal in the country.

He added: "They launched the lanterns with good wishes and had no idea what could happen" - saying there was nothing in the product description showing that they were banned.

Advertisement

He said limited details would be given about the suspects, who feared reprisals after receiving threats.





Five orangutans, two gorillas, a chimpanzee and several monkeys were among the animals killed in the fire

The mini hot air balloons made of paper have been used in Asia for centuries, but unlike fireworks, they are both unusual and illegal in Germany.

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~~Florida woman tried to build an explosive device in shop using items from shelves~~

~~Glitch saw UK fail to tell EU countries about 75,000 convictions of foreign criminals~~

~~Effigy of 'undesirable' UK ambassador Rob Macaire burned in Iran~~

Prosecutor Jens Frobel says the women are suspected of negligent arson, which can carry a prison sentence of up to five years.

Investigators believe just one lantern started the fire, which began in a corner of the roof of the ape house in the first

minutes of the New Year, before spreading quickly.

They found the other four later, with handwritten good wishes for the New Year attached.



Only two chimpanzees - Bally and Limbo - survived the fire at Krefeld Zoo





People pay tribute outside Krefeld Zoo after more than 30 animals died

Dozens of animals died in the fire, including five orangutans, two gorillas, a chimpanzee and several monkeys - as well as fruit bats and birds.

They either burned to death or died from smoke inhalation.

Only two chimpanzees - Bally and Limbo - survived, according to Krefeld Zoo director Wolfgang Dressen.

He described the fire as the hardest day the zoo has ever experienced, adding that what happened was an "unfathomable tragedy".



Wolfgang Dressen, director of the zoo, called the fire an 'unfathomable tragedy'

The ape house lacked fire detectors and sprinklers, which were not required when it was built in the 1970s - but the zoo said it had passed a regular fire protection check just a few months ago.

The building's roof had been renovated after a hailstorm a few years ago and plexiglass was added.

Mr Hoppmann said while investigators were confident the sky lantern was to blame, they will look at other factors that may have contributed to the blaze, such as dry fallen leaves on the roof.

Investigators plan to carry out tests to help find out why it spread so quickly.

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WEST MIDLANDS FIRE SERVICE



17005 - Sky Lanterns

 Created On February 09, 2017  by James Round

FOI Search  Fire Safety  17005 - Sky Lanterns

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Ref: FOI/17005.

RE: FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 REQUEST

I am writing to confirm that the West Midlands Fire Service has now completed its search for the information you requested on 15th January 2017.

Please find below a summary of our findings.

Document

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surtrace could result in a fire.

West Midlands Fire Service doesn't support the use of these and we urge members of the public and event organisers not to use them

Request

I live in Solihull but my plan was to go somewhere else, probably south of England. . Should I refer to local fire organizations?

Reply.

Normally, the Fire Service are not informed of this type of activity, however, it may be prudent to check with the local authority if you are intending to go away for the surprise.

If you have any queries about this email, please contact me. Please remember to quote the reference number above in any future communications. If you are unhappy with the service you have received in relation to your request and wish to make a complaint or request a review of our decision please write to The Public Relations Department, West Midlands Fire Service, 99 Vauxhall Road, Birmingham, B7 4HW

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KOMMUNENES INTERNASJONALE
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KIMO RESOLUTION 1/15

Presented by KIMO International Secretariat

Mass Balloon Releases

Millions of helium-filled latex balloons are intentionally released into the atmosphere each year. Whilst balloon releases play an important role in business and promotional events the debris from balloons poses a serious ingestion and entanglement hazard to marine animals and birds. Fragments from balloons also contribute to the accumulation of litter in the marine environment, one of the fastest growing threats for the world's oceans health. The issue has been highlighted by the United Nations Environment Program and was included in the 11 Descriptors set by Europe's Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) (2008/56/EC)¹. The MSFD requires each Descriptor in all European marine waters not to deviate from the undisturbed state and reach Good Environmental Status (GES) by 2020.

The increasing contribution to marine litter of balloon debris is seen right across Europe. In Sweden a study of data from the OSPAR pilot project on Marine Beach Litter Monitoring shows a significant increase in marine litter consisting of latex balloons². Statistics from the OSPAR Beach Litter Monitoring data in the Netherlands (2002-2012) show a highly significant increase in the amount of balloon debris. The amount of balloon debris found on Dutch beaches was between 3% and 5%, putting it in the top 10 most frequently counted items³. A study in the UK of the Marine Conservation Society (MCS) Beachwatch litter surveys has shown the number of balloons and balloon pieces found on beaches has tripled in the last 15 years. In the 2013 Marine Conservation Society Beachwatch surveys the average density was 12.2 items/km, with a total of 1,176 pieces of balloon litter recorded. This is the highest average balloon litter density level recorded since the surveys began in 1993⁴.

Studies show that when latex balloons are released they rise to an altitude of five miles where the vast majority (around 95%) will rupture. Although partially

shredded, most of these remain intact. The remaining 5% may float many miles before descending intact, wholly or partially deflated⁵. In 2007 balloons were released in the Netherlands to celebrate Queensday. Many of these (more than 10 balloons per kilometre coastline) were recovered from Normandy, over 800km away. The largest ever balloon release was 1.4 million in the USA. Of those, it has been reported that as many as 140 000 could have descended intact, to the land or sea.

Latex balloons are often cited as biodegradable. However, in spite of its natural origin, latex does not degrade sufficiently quickly to avoid ingestion by marine wildlife and potential damage to their digestive system⁶. Balloons submerged in saltwater have been shown to remain intact for more than a year⁵. Ingestion of balloon debris poses both a physical and a chemical hazard to marine animals and causes significant harm. Marine animals, notably turtles, dolphins and whales mistake balloons floating in water for prey and swallow them which can block digestive tracts, causing the animal to slowly starve. Similarly, fragments of balloon debris will gather in the gut so that material ingested over many months binds together to gradually create a dangerous blockage which may release harmful chemical toxins⁷. Attachments such as strings and ribbons take even longer to decompose and can cause entanglement. The Marine Conservation Society's Beachwatch survey in 2005 found that balloons and their ribbons and strings accounted for 4% of entanglements of marine creatures recorded over a single weekend⁸.

It is difficult to assess the true rate of entanglement and ingestion caused to marine animals by balloon litter. We do know, however, that more than 265 species of birds, fish, mammals and marine turtles, including endangered and threatened species, have ingested or become entangled in marine debris⁹. This represents an unknown proportion of all entanglements and ingestion that occur and presents a conservative estimate of the actual scale of the problem.

It is important to note there are many sustainable alternatives to balloon releases that provide the economic and social benefits without harming the environment and these have been widely documented.

KIMO

Recognising the need to protect marine wildlife from the increasing burden of marine litter caused by balloon debris:

Urges the European Commission and Member States to recognise balloon releases as a form of littering and implement legislation to reduce the number of balloons released into the environment by introducing national bans on all outdoor releases of balloons.

**KIMO members:
Agree to submit this resolution to all National Governments, the
European Commission and other relevant organisations.**

¹ Galgani F, Hanke G, Werner S, De Vrees L (2013) Marine litter within the European Marine Strategy Framework Directive. ICES J. Mar. Sci 70: 1055–1064. doi: 10.1093/icesjms/fst122

² Svärd, B. 2013. Analys av data från OSPAR:s referensstränder åren 2001-2011. Ren Kust Bohuslän http://www.renkust.se/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Rapport-referensstrander_56sid.pdf

³ Dagevos, J.J. et al. 2013. OSPAR Beach Litter Monitoring in the Netherlands. First Annual Report 2002-2012. Update 2012. Report BLM.afv-2310. 2012. North Sea Foundation, Utrecht

⁴ Marine Conservation Society. 2014. The intentional outdoor release of balloons and Chinese/sky lanterns. Pollution Policy and Position Statement http://www.mcsuk.org/downloads/pollution/beachwatch/MCS_balloons_and_chinese_lanterns_policy.pdf (accessed 15 July 2015)

⁵ Foley, A.M. 1990. A preliminary investigation on some specific aspects of latex balloon degradation. Published on <http://balloonsblow.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/1990-Balloon-Study1.pdf> (accessed 15 July 2015)

⁶ Van Franeker, J.A. 2015. Five small facts about balloon litter. <http://www.wageningenur.nl/en/Expertise-Services/Research-Institutes/mares/Dossiers/5-Small-facts-about-balloon-debris.htm> (accessed 15 July 2015)

⁷ Andrady, A.L. 2000. Plastics and their impacts in the marine environment. Proceedings of the International marine Debris Conference on *Derelict Fishing Gear and the Ocean Environment*

⁸ Keep Scotland Beautiful. Balloon and flying lantern statement. <http://www.keepsotlandbeautiful.org/balloonsandlanterns> (accessed 15 July 2015)

⁹ Laist, D.W. 1997. Impacts of Marine Debris: Entanglement of marine life in marine debris including a comprehensive list of species with entanglement and ingestion records. In Coe, J. And Rogers, D.B. (eds) *Marine Debris: Sources, Impacts and Solutions*. Springer Series on Environmental Management

THE INTENTIONAL OUTDOOR RELEASE OF BALLOONS AND CHINESE/SKY LANTERNS POLLUTION POLICY AND POSITION STATEMENT

SUMMARY OF OUR POLICY, 'ASKS' AND ACTIONS

Our Policy and Position

MCS is of the opinion that:

- 1) Intentional outdoor releases of balloons and sky lanterns are an act of littering and should be classified as such. What goes up must eventually fall back down to earth and/or sea, where it can either entangle wildlife, or be ingested if certain species confuse balloons/balloon fragments for food (such as endangered marine turtles).
- 2) We are against any forms of litter entering the sea – either directly or indirectly – and, we do not distinguish between differing types of balloon material, the main types of which are latex (rubber) and foil (also known as mylar). Latex balloons, whilst biodegradable, may still persist in the marine environment for up to four years.
- 3) We are not against the use of balloons *per se*, and support their use when they are used and disposed of responsibly, but not released intentionally outdoors to add to the already significant amount of litter in the environment. We are aware of the potential for adverse economic impacts on businesses that manufacture and distribute balloons, and are not recommending that balloon products are banned, only that balloons and lanterns are classed as litter and outdoor releases made illegal under existing legislation such as the Environmental Protection Act 1990 or the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005.
- 4) We do not wish to prevent fundraising events or spoil people's fun, and a number of alternative activities can still take place and be used to raise funds without the need to intentionally release balloons or sky lanterns into the atmosphere.
- 5) We do not see a problem with indoor balloon events taking place but recommend that balloons should be air filled - this would ensure that should any balloons be accidentally released, they will not rise as far or be distributed over such a large area.
- 6) We are also aware that helium gas is a limited resource and therefore recommend that balloons should always be air filled, thereby preserving limited helium supplies.
- 7) We are aware that balloons may also be used for research purposes, for example, weather balloons. We are not against the release of these, as we believe the number involved to be minimal compared to the current number of intentionally released helium-filled balloons for commemorative, social or publicity events.

Our 'Asks'

- 1) MCS is asking UK administrations to recognise balloons and sky lanterns as a form of littering and ban all releases of outdoor balloons and sky lanterns
- 2) MCS will continue to ask local authorities to ban all outdoor releases of balloons and sky lanterns on their land
- 3) MCS is asking all individuals to use alternative ideas (such as those proposed in our [Don't Let Go Action Pack](#) and in Appendix 4) to releasing balloons or sky lanterns or to only release balloons indoors, ensuring they are air-filled

Our Actions

In order to make continuous progress towards achieving our asks, in 2012, MCS in conjunction with KWT and Welsh Eco-schools, presented an environmental business case to the Welsh Government to recognise outdoor balloon and sky lantern releases as littering. A petition, urging the Welsh Government to ban all intentional outdoor balloon and lantern releases, resulted in the Welsh Environment Minister asking officials to collect further evidence on this issue and working with England, produced a report to which MCS provided evidence. The report, published in May 2013, highlighted a significant fire hazard posed by sky lanterns; particularly to crops and aviation. It also acknowledged the ongoing risk to coastal rescue services who are falsely alerted to call-outs when lanterns are mistaken for distress flares. The Minister for Natural Resources and Food has subsequently written to all Welsh local authorities encouraging them to bring in a voluntary release ban on council owned land.

MCS will strive to:

- 1) Make similar asks of the Northern Ireland Executive, Scottish Government and the UK Government.
- 2) Work with local authorities to bring in release bans on council owned land
- 3) Work in partnership with other stakeholders who share similar ideals
- 4) Aid other charities and organisations in coming up with alternative ideas to balloon or sky lantern releases
- 5) Engage with the public and community groups to raise awareness of the issue and support them in getting balloon and sky lantern releases stopped, using the MCS Don't Let Go! campaign action pack

Contents

1	Purpose	4
2	Geographic Extent of this Pollution Policy and Position Statement	4
3	Background.....	5
4	Introduction	6
5	Key Issues	7
5.1	The Magnitude and Extent of Balloon Debris	8
6	Discussion	9
6.1	Harm to wildlife	10
6.2	Clean-up Costs	14
6.3	Helium: A Dwindling Resource.....	14
6.4	The fate of Balloons in the Marine Environment.....	15
6.5	Sky Lanterns.....	19
6.6	Alternatives to Intentional Outdoor Releases of Balloons and Sky Lanterns	22
7	Policy Decisions.....	22
8	MCS's Actions	23
9	Important Note	24
10	List of Acronyms.....	25

1 Purpose

The purpose of this Pollution Policy and Position Statement (PPPS) is to identify the key issues related to the environmental impacts of intentional releases of balloons and sky lanterns (formerly referred to as Chinese lanterns), which have been used to formulate our position.

The blue box at the beginning of this PPPS contains a summary of our policy, ‘asks’ and actions; the rest of this document provides the evidence, discussion and reasoning behind these, if the reader requires further detail or explanation of any of these points.

This PPPS continues our theme of evidence-based campaigning and dissemination of information relating to the environmental impacts of human activities on our seas and coastline, using publicly available documents and data. Wherever possible, references have been used from robust sources; a complete list of references has been given at the end of this document in Appendix 5.

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Here at MCS we strive to ensure all our communications are as accurate and objective as possible. However, if you identify any errors or omissions within this PPPS, we would be grateful if you could bring them to our attention. Please contact MCS by either calling us on 01989 566017 or by writing to us at info@mcsuk.org. Please remember to quote the version number and date of issue of this document when you contact us.

2 Geographic Extent of this Pollution Policy and Position Statement

This PPPS applies to the whole of the UK and attempts, wherever possible, to take into account issues relating to England and those devolved to Scotland (and the Scottish Government), Wales (and the Welsh Government) and Northern Ireland (and the Northern Ireland Executive) respectively. Throughout this document, the collective term “UK administrations” is used to refer to these four separate bodies.

3 Background

The Environmental Protection Act 1990 (EPA) is the main piece of legislation dealing with litter throughout Great Britain and the Isles of Scilly, whilst the equivalent piece of legislation in Northern Ireland is the Litter (Northern Ireland) Order 1994 (L(NI)O); however, neither the EPA nor the L(NI)O provides a legal definition of litter. Section 87 of the EPA states that, for England and Wales, a person is guilty of an offence "if he throws down, drops or otherwise deposits any litter in any place to which this Section applies and leaves it"; for Scotland, the same Section states that an offence is committed "if any person throws down, drops or otherwise deposits in, into or from any place to which this Section applies, and leaves, any thing whatsoever in such circumstances as to cause, or contribute to, or tend to lead to, the defacement by litter of any place to which this section applies".

Article 3 of the L(NI)O has the following, very similar, provision to the EPA: "If any person throws down, drops or otherwise deposits in, into or from any place open to the air, and leaves, any thing whatsoever in such circumstances as to cause, or contribute to, or tend to lead to, the defacement by litter of any such place, he shall ... be guilty of an offence".

As a guideline, litter includes items that are improperly discarded and left by members of the public (including cigarette butts) or are spilt during business operations. Items the size of a single plastic sack of rubbish would usually be considered fly tipping rather than litter (and which may be covered by other legislation, such as the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1985).

The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 (CNEA) applies to England, Wales and the Isles of Scilly. Under Section 19 of the CNEA, designated local authority officers can issue fixed penalty notices of a default amount of £75 (as established by the CNEA), or any other amount as set by the local authority, with 14 days to pay. Failure to pay a fixed penalty notice can result in the matter being escalated and subsequently tried in a Magistrates' Court, where a fine of up to £2,500 (level 4 on the standard scale) can be imposed.

Similar provisions are made by the Litter (Fixed Penalty) Scotland Order 2003 and the Litter (Fixed Penalty) Order (Northern Ireland) 2004; one notable difference though is that the amount of the fixed penalty notice in Scotland and Northern Ireland is only £50.

4 Introduction

Outdoor balloon releases have become a traditional and all-too-common event at summer fairs and fundraising events, the opening of new stores, or even as part of commemorative occasions, but few people stop to think about what happens to the balloons once they are released and the potentially lethal consequences for wildlife that can occur as a result of this form of celebration. What goes up must eventually fall back down to earth elsewhere, where it will be viewed as litter, and potentially a hazard to wildlife as well. Releases range in scale from the local village fete, remembrance and fundraising events through to global media events.

Since 1990, due to the ambiguous wording in the EPA, it has become questionable whether balloon releases are within the law. Newcastle City Council issued a fixed penalty notice in 2008 of £50 for the dropping of a balloon (BBC, 2008). This is the only report we are aware of at the time of writing (Sept 2014) of someone being fined for balloon litter.

The problems caused by mass balloon releases were first highlighted at a conference in Canada in 1989 (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador Guidance Document, 2002) on plastic and other debris found at sea. Balloons had been found accumulating on islands off the east coast of Canada; some were still partially inflated and their country of origin was traced to the USA.

Balloon releases immediately began to be cancelled in response to these findings, and even the Canadian government decided to cancel the release of tens of thousands of balloons in Ottawa to mark Canada Day. This wave of anti-balloon sentiment has continued to spread across the whole of North America and many states in the US have now abandoned balloon releases.

There are several examples of regional/state jurisdictions across the world that have banned balloon releases including:

- New South Wales (Australia) (in relation to the planned – but subsequently cancelled – Sydney Olympics balloon release)
- Queensland (Australia)
- Florida (USA)
- Virginia (USA)
- Connecticut (USA)
- Tennessee (USA)

- Texas (USA)
- California (USA)

Legislation is pending in other American states including Massachusetts, Maryland and New York (Clean Virginia Waterways, 2012).

MCS has for many years highlighted the effects of balloon releases on the environment and wildlife through the 'Up, Up and Away' factsheet, launched in 1998 with the Royal Society for the Protection of Animals (RSPCA), Tidy Britain Group (TBG now known as Keep Britain Tidy) and the National Farmers' Union (NFU); this was subsequently rebranded as the 'Don't Let Go' campaign in 2006. We originally focussed on mass balloon releases but now we use the phrase "intentional releases", due to the fact that there is no real definition of how many balloons constitute a "mass release". As far as we are concerned, any number of balloons released into the environment will contribute to the overall littering problem as well as posing a threat to wildlife.

An alternative to balloon releases that has been growing in popularity is the release of sky (formerly known as Chinese) lanterns, which are often released into the sky at night at events such as weddings, festivals or commemorative events. We are concerned about the impacts of lanterns on marine wildlife and the contribution to rising beach litter levels. A great deal of concern has been expressed about sky lanterns by the NFU; we have attempted to capture this in a separate sky lantern section within this document, and taken the decision to broaden the extent of what was originally intended to be a balloons-only PPPS to include sky lanterns as well.

5 Key Issues

We feel that balloons, whether they are partially inflated, pieces, or fragments (with or without string and card attachments), can be successfully and robustly argued as being litter, based on the information presented in this document.

The balloon litter issue was discussed in the House of Lords in 1990 when the Environment Bill (subsequently enacted as the EPA) was progressing through the Houses of Parliament. An amendment to the Bill was submitted and taken forward in the House of Lords by Lord Ross of

Newport. Whilst Lord Ross had proposed that the word 'release' be included in the Bill so as to capture the release of balloons, the proposal was rejected. The reason for this was that it was felt that this amendment was potentially too far reaching and had unintended consequences, and that the views of all interested parties should first be considered, so the amendment was withdrawn.

Many people do not consider balloons to be litter due to the fact they are let go of rather than dropped, resulting in an 'out-of-sight out-of-mind' mentality. Balloon releases can also be argued as being symbolic of our wasteful 'throwaway' society. When people are made aware by MCS of the problems balloon releases pose they are usually receptive to adopting less impactful actions, as demonstrated by the many local authorities that have adopted bans on intentional balloon releases on their land (see Appendix 1), or by organisations such as Barclays and Marks & Spencer, who have changed their company policies and no longer support balloon release activities (see Appendix 2).

In our opinion, balloon releases are an act of littering and should be specified as such.

5.1 The Magnitude and Extent of Balloon Debris

MCS's Beachwatch Big Weekend is the only UK-wide beach clean and survey of its type and it has taken place annually over the third weekend of each September since 1993. The results show that the average number of balloons and balloon pieces found on UK beaches has tripled in 2013 when compared to figures in 1996. In 1996 balloon litter items were 3.4 items/km with a total of 663 items identified, and in 2013 the average density was 12.20 items/km with a total of 1,176 balloon litter items recorded (see Figure 1). This is the highest average balloon litter density level recorded since we started surveying this litter item!

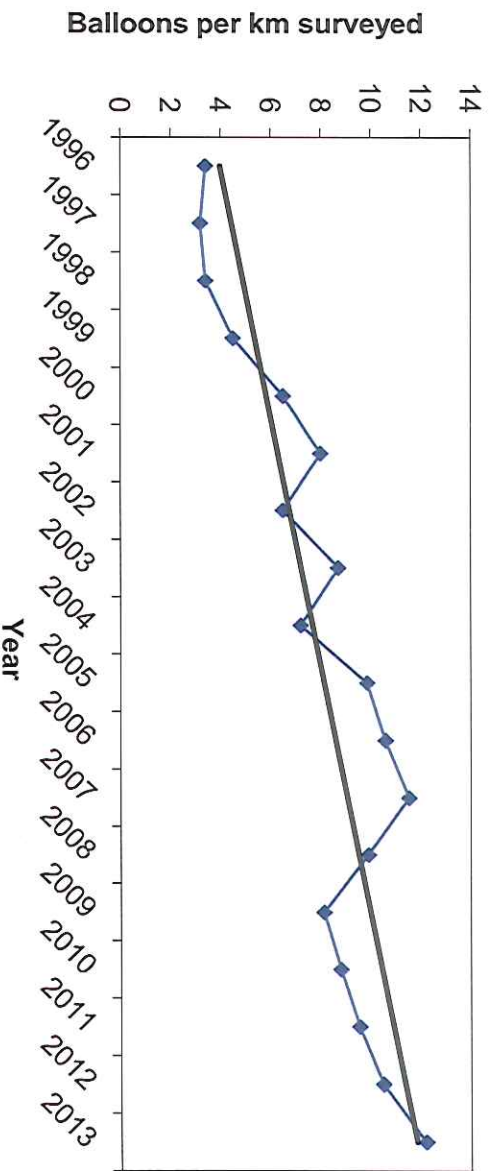


Figure 1: The average density (items/km) of balloon litter items found on UK beaches from 1996 to 2013 inclusive

The Ocean Conservancy (based in the United States) organises an annual world-wide beach and river clean-up (involving nearly 650,000 volunteers in 92 countries and locations) called the International Coastal Clean-up (ICC), of which MCS's Beachwatch Big Weekend represents the UK's contribution. A total of 52,918 balloons were collected during the 2013 ICC, globally and at least 15 animals were listed as having been entangled in plastic ribbon or string. The overall total number of balloons collected since the beginning of the ICC (1986-2013) is a staggering 1,762,654! (Ocean Conservancy 2013)

It is important to note that MCS and ICC data are based on beach litter surveys from one weekend in September only, so it is therefore likely to be a huge underestimate of the number of balloon litter items found on UK beaches throughout the year. In addition, balloons washing up on beaches represent only a fraction of the numbers that will already be at sea.

6 Discussion

Intentional releases of balloons have several impacts on wildlife, society and the environment in general which we should all be concerned about, including:

- 1) Harm to wildlife through entanglement in string and ribbon and the ingestion of deflated and fragmented balloons;

- 2) The costs to society for cleaning up balloon debris; and
- 3) The irresponsible and inappropriate (in MCS's view) use of helium in intentional balloon releases.

Each of these issues will now be considered in turn.

6.1 Harm to wildlife

Once balloons are released they can become a serious form of marine pollution for marine wildlife – the two main threats are through ingestion (eating a balloon or pieces of balloon due to mistaking them for prey items such as jellyfish) and from getting tangled up in balloon string or ribbon. Whether a balloon is attached to a string or not, if it is filled with helium it can be carried by winds for great distances, until it eventually starts to deflate and drift back down to earth, where it can present a choking or digestion hazard.

The list of marine creatures affected by balloon entanglement and/or ingestion includes dolphins, whales, turtles, and seabirds. In some cases, these animals are opportunistic feeders, taking anything they consider edible within the water column. For example, the juveniles of most marine turtles and adult leatherback turtles inhabit oceanic habitats and will attempt to feed opportunistically on anything they find floating near the surface, resulting in frequent interactions with marine debris, including balloons, leading to ingestion and entanglement (Lutcavage et al. 1997).

The following species have been reported with latex balloons in their digestive systems:

- Common dolphin (Walker & Coe, 1990)*
- Risso's dolphin (Walker & Coe, 1990)*
- Loggerhead turtle (Coe & Rogers, 1996)*
- Leatherback turtle (Marine Mammal Stranding Centre)*
- Green turtle (Penrose, RS 2002)
- Northern fulmar (Coe & Rogers, 1996)*
- Fulmars (Nevins et al, 2005) *
- Sperm whale (Marine Mammal Stranding Centre)*
- Northern giant petrel (Australian Seabird Rescue team)

* These particular studies were undertaken in the USA, but all of these species occur in the North East Atlantic waters off the coasts of the UK and can therefore be affected by balloon releases from this country.

It is difficult to assess the true rate of entanglement and ingestion caused to marine animals by litter, as many animals that die may sink to the sea floor or be consumed by predators further up the food chain before being found. Only a minority of animals will wash up on the UK's shores so, unless they strand and a necropsy is carried out, it is often impossible to ascertain the exact cause of death.

We do know, however, that over 170 species of marine wildlife have ingested litter at sea and that at least 136 species of marine vertebrate and eight invertebrate species have been entangled in marine litter (Lalst, 1997). These records represent an unknown proportion of all entanglements and ingestion that occur and present a conservative estimate of the actual scale of the problem.

We also know that balloons can kill and harm wildlife as there are cases around the world where the death of marine wildlife has been attributed to balloon ingestion.

In 1985 the Marine Mammal Stranding Centre (MMSC) of New Jersey recorded the death of a sperm whale that had starved after ingesting a deflated, but complete, mylar¹ (foil) balloon with 3ft of ribbon still attached. The MMSC noted that *"the internal examination of the animal showed a blockage of the pyloric valve which connects the stomach with the intestinal tract which means that food could not be passed through leading to the whale starving to death"*.

In 1987 the MMSC recorded the death of a leatherback turtle that had starved after ingesting a single latex (rubber) balloon with string attached, again blocking the pyloric valve (MMSC, 1989). The pyloric valve is designed to allow the passage of natural food items, primarily jellyfish in leatherback turtles, through the digestive tract. Unnatural items such as latex balloons

¹ The vast majority of balloons manufactured today will fall into one of two categories – latex, or mylar. Both types can cause entanglement and ingestion issues, so no further distinction is made between these two categories within this document.

or other plastic products are unable to pass through the small opening (which is about half inch in diameter), which can result in two possible causes of death (MMSC, 1989):

1. The blockage will not allow digested food to pass through the system, thus creating a toxic build-up within the turtle's system; and/or
2. Since no items can pass through the stomach, there is no room for additional nourishment to be taken in, causing slow starvation.

In 1988, four loggerhead turtles were found to be near death floating in Long Island Sound in the United States. The animals were held in captivity for several weeks whilst undergoing rehabilitation. The passage of two latex balloons was noticed from one or more of the submerged turtles. After seven weeks the balloons were still colourful and pliable. The passage of the balloons was attributed to a mackerel diet, which is heavy in oils and fats, which may have assisted in the lubrication in the intestinal tract to allow the passage of the latex balloons (MMSC 1989).

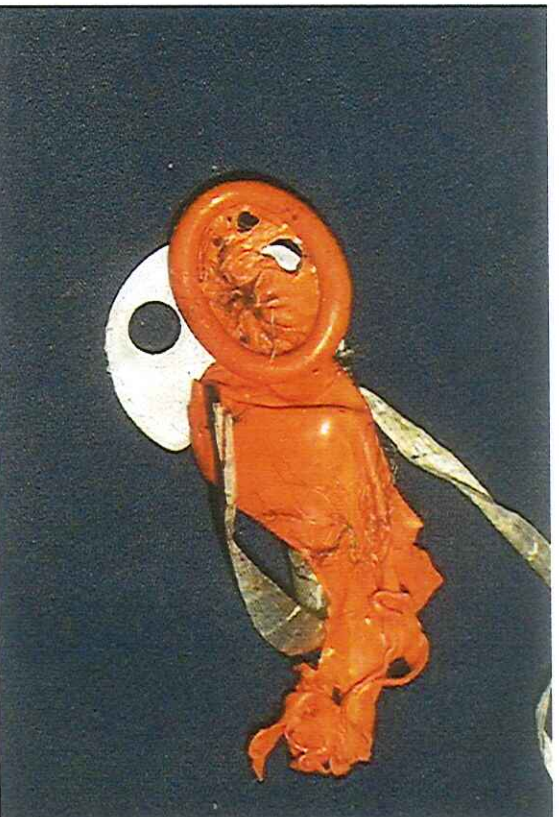
In addition, studies conducted by the University of Texas Marine Science Institute indicated 5% of marine turtles stranded dead on the Texas coast of the Gulf of Mexico, and subjected to necropsy, had ingested latex balloons (MMSC, 1989).

Again it is important to stress that these case studies involve only those few animals that strand and/or are found, reported and subjected to a post-mortem, and are thus only indicative of the extent of the impact of marine litter on these marine species.

Closer to home, in 2001, a dead juvenile green turtle was found stranded at Knott End-on-Sea beach, Blackpool. The cause of death was given as oesophageal impaction and stomach impaction resulting from ingestion of plastic, and a large fragment of blue balloon was found in the stomach, along with a fragment of plastic lodged in the oesophagus (Penrose, 2002).

A report by the Australian Seabird Rescue team describes harm caused to a Northern giant petrel: *"The bird had ribbon hanging from its beak leading to a balloon being removed from its intestine. It would have starved to death had the balloon not been removed"* (Ferris, 2006).

Figure 2 shows the balloon which was removed from the Northern giant petrel, 10 months later. This clearly demonstrates that, even after several months, the latex balloon had not degraded.



**Figure 2: Photo taken 25 March 2007 of a balloon fragment removed from a Giant Petrel ©
Australian Seabird Rescue Team**

Following Koninginnedag, or Queen's Day, in the Netherlands in 2007, large numbers of Dutch balloons were found in Normandy, France, and balloon fragments were found in 1-2% of stomachs of Northern fulmars beached in the North Sea area (Franeker, 2008).

Other records of balloon ingestion include common dolphins in Californian waters, loggerhead turtles in Texan waters and a green turtle that died in Florida after eating a partially inflated latex balloon (Laist, 1997).

In addition to marine wildlife ingesting balloons and balloon fragments, balloon string and ribbon can also create an entanglement issue; the image in Figure 3 of an entangled razorbill shows this quite clearly.



Figure 3: A razorbill entangled in the ribbon from a balloon © Christine McGuinness

Again, it is important to stress that these case studies involve only those animals that strand and are found, and are thus only indicative of the extent of the impact of marine litter on these species. It is worth noting that balloon litter does not only affect marine species. In May 2011 a bullock was found dead in Kent with a balloon tag hanging out of its mouth. The balloon had been released during a local primary school event, and the farmer estimated the value of the lost bullock as £1,000 (Farmers Guardian, 2011).

6.2 Clean-up Costs

There is a financial cost to intentional balloon releases, as well as an environmental one. Local authorities – and ultimately local taxpayers – bear the financial burden of clearing litter from UK beaches. In a recent study it was calculated that the UK spends approximately 18 million Euros removing beach litter every year (KIMO, 2010), or approximately £15 million. As balloons account for 0.5% of all beach litter found during the Beachwatch Big Weekend 2013 survey, a pro rata cost of £75,000 can be applied to the cost of clearing balloons alone from the UK's beaches every year. If we can reduce this type of litter at source this clearly has a benefit to all of us, both environmentally and financially.

6.3 Helium: A Dwindling Resource

As well as for inflating balloons and blimps, helium is used to purge rocket engines for NASA and the military and is crucial for diving equipment, particle accelerators, and MRI scanners, but

an article published in National Geographic in 2011 (National Geographic, 2011) highlighted helium as a dwindling resource. An article in the Guardian also highlighted that key experiments, designed to probe the structure of matter, had to be cancelled because the facility had run out of helium (The Guardian, 2012). The National Research Council stated: “We’re running out. Most of the world’s helium comes from beneath America’s Great Plains, where it’s trapped in natural gas. The US began stockpiling it in the 1960s, but in 1996 opted to recoup its investment and sell off the reserve by 2015. After that, other producers—including Russia, Algeria, and Qatar—will control what’s left of the global market; perhaps a mere 40 years’ worth.”

Two years on and prospects do not appear quite so bleak, however what is apparent is the need to conserve existing resources. It is therefore important to try to recover and reuse helium and, wherever possible, to find alternative solutions.<http://www.decodedscience.com/helium-shortage-situation-update-one-year-later/42314>.

It is in all of our best interests to conserve what vital reserves we have left of helium and not waste a valuable resource through balloon releases, which provide a few seconds of enjoyment and which can help contribute to the death of marine wildlife.

6.4 The fate of Balloons in the Marine Environment

Justifications for balloon releases have been largely based on a single piece of research published in 1989 by D.K. Burchette, the then Technical Advisor for the Environmental Committee for the National Association of Balloon Artists and Suppliers (NABAS), the umbrella organisation which represents the balloon industry in the UK. As Burchette was commissioned by NABAS to write the report it could be argued this may have led to a conflict of interest when objectively presenting the report’s findings.

Calculations were carried out in determining the fate of rubber latex balloons under different environmental conditions in order to measure degradability and, based on the results, recommendations were made concerning rules to limit the impact of balloons on the environment. The results stated that an inconsequential number of balloons fall intact into the ocean because 90% of them rise to an altitude of five miles, where they then fracture into tiny fragments or pieces. These “tiny” fragments or pieces still have to fall somewhere and contribute to marine litter as a whole being consumed by marine wildlife, presenting a significant

threat to small, hatchling turtles. It should also be noted that all species of sea turtles are considered endangered, threatened or vulnerable.

Of the remaining 10% of balloons that will fall back down to earth, they will remain intact and be either wholly or partially deflated, and may be transported long distances by air currents and can easily be blown thousands of miles from their release point, as a case study from Australia shows.

On 15 August 2007, several balloons were found tied together on South Ballina beach, New South Wales. One of the balloons originated from Mingara Recreation Club on the Central Coast of New South Wales, 660km south of Ballina. The balloons had not only travelled 660 kilometres, but they had not 'fractured into small harmless pieces' as suggested by Burchette (Lance Ferris, 2006).

The 10% of balloons which may not reach the necessary five mile altitude return to earth either fully or partially inflated. This could still represent tens of thousands of balloons every year, reaching both land and sea. The largest ever balloon release was 1.4 million balloons (Balloons IT 2004) 10% of which - 140,000 - may have returned to the land or into the sea.

Given the island nature of the UK, there is a high probability that balloons released in most parts of the country – nowhere being more than 100 miles from the coast – will, if they do not make the five mile limit and burst, fall into the sea.

A study to test whether turtles can digest latex balloons was carried out using pieces of balloon. These balloon pieces took up to four months to pass through the intestinal tract, often being passed undigested in a mass (Lutz, 1989). This study has been used by organisers of balloon releases as proof that balloons have no detrimental effect on turtles, but no test was carried out to study the effect of ingesting whole or partial balloons. The test actually revealed that turtles will actively consume plastic and latex material when hungry and that, although little change in blood chemistry was noted following ingestion in these experiments, except for a fall in blood glucose levels, some turtles became positively buoyant, meaning they would float. In the wild, positive buoyancy could make turtles more susceptible to collisions with boats, increase the

chance of incidental capture in some commercial fisheries and increase predation risk (Lutz, 1997).

Burchette's study also indicated that latex balloons "degrade about as fast as an oak leaf" and this is often used in defence of intentional balloon releases by balloon manufacturers. The balloon industry claims that an oak leaf in a cold water environment may take six months to break down but there is no hard evidence to substantiate where this six month timescale has come from, as the trials conducted by Burchette were conducted over only six weeks. Even if balloons lasted only six months in the environment, during this time the balloons can be carried hundreds of miles by currents and still be ingested by marine life.

Whilst we completely agree that latex balloons are biodegradable, breakdown times for latex in the marine environment are considerably longer. Partially deflated balloons and sizeable fragments will indeed lose their tensile strength on exposure to air and sunlight. However, in seawater they are submerged or subject to constant wetting, which inhibits the ability of the sun (through heat and light) to aid photochemical breakdown. Low water temperatures in the UK will also have an implication on how long a product takes to degrade. The rate of breakdown can be further reduced by chemical or biological fouling (Andrady, 2000). Marine life, such as barnacles or seaweeds, will attach and grow on the surface of litter items at sea, including balloons. Over time the weight of plant and animal life can cause the item to sink and/or reduce the effect of natural breakdown.

Anthony L. Andrady, a senior research scientist from the Chemistry and Life Sciences Division, in North Carolina, states: "*Latex rubber balloons are an important category of product in the marine environment. Promotional releases of balloons that descend into the sea pose a serious ingestion and/or entanglement hazard to marine animals. Based on the fairly rapid disintegration of balloons on exposure to sunlight in air, the expectation is that balloons do not pose a particularly significant problem. In an experiment we carried out in North Carolina we observed that balloons exposed floating in seawater deteriorated much slower than those exposed in air, and even after 12 months of exposure still retained their elasticity*" (Andrady, A.L. 6th August, 2000).

Various estimates also exist for the period it takes an oak leaf to breakdown on land. A study published in the peer-reviewed scientific journal "Soil Biology and Biochemistry" found that about 54% of oak leaves decomposed in a two-year period, and it takes about four years for oak leaves to completely degrade under natural land-based conditions (Sarıyıldız, 2005). In addition, oak leaf decomposition time was investigated in a study looking at grass and leaf nutrient release input under wet conditions, resulting in little obvious physical decomposition of oak leaves after 180 days, which is just under 6 months (Strynchuk et al, undated).

It would appear that the balloon industry has been successful in leading the public into thinking that biodegradable latex balloons pose no threat to marine wildlife and that this product will simply disappear after six months. Yet the case studies highlighting harm and death to wildlife – as well as estimates for breakdown times of latex material in the marine environment highlighted in this PPPS – provide evidence to the contrary.

The balloon industry is also of the belief that the descent of balloons following a release does not constitute a litter problem and that "*most of us never see balloons on the ground that have come from a balloon release, even though balloon releases occur very frequently throughout the country*" (Burchette, 1989), yet both MCS & ICC beach litter data reveals a very different picture. Balloon litter has tripled on UK beaches over the last 15 years.

NABAS has developed a code of conduct acknowledging the potential environmental risks of balloon releases; whilst we acknowledge that it contains some good points, such as advising event organisers that no ribbons or strings must be attached to the balloons and that plastic valves should not be used, the problem with the code is that it is entirely voluntary and it still advocates balloon releases. We frequently find balloons (and multiple balloons tied together) with string or ribbon and plastic valves attached on our beach cleans and surveys, so the code is evidently not being adhered to by all event organisers, as the image below clearly shows.



Figure 4: Balloons found at Lynemouth Bay, Northumberland © Kevin Redgrave

There are many marine creatures constantly searching for food sources. A floating balloon, or a piece thereof, could look like a food source, whether it is biodegradable, deflated, or a small, so-called 'harmless' piece which continues to be a significant threat to our wildlife, irrespective of the size, colour, texture or shape of the pollutant.

Balloon launches are a traditional part of summer activities in the UK and the banning of balloon releases could prove unpopular with the general public. However, if such a ban was run in conjunction with a public awareness campaign on the negative impacts caused by releasing balloons, combined with ideas for alternatives that could be used, people may be more likely to support the introduction of a ban.

6.5 Sky Lanterns

It is not only balloons that are causing a problem – people are increasingly releasing sky lanterns (formerly known as Chinese lanterns). The metal lantern frame is dangerous to wildlife and livestock, posing a further entanglement threat, and mounting concerns have been expressed by the farming sector.

The NFU is calling for a ban on lanterns if their concerns are not addressed. The NFU believes that an outright ban is not yet justified - but that if those who manufacture and supply flying lanterns fail to address the problem in the immediate future, then there will be no alternative (NFU 2010). Livestock are being killed from eating degraded lanterns which are accidentally picked

up by harvest machinery and put into winter feeds. A Cheshire farmer lost one of his pedigree cattle worth £1,000 after it died from eating the wire frame from a lantern (Cheshire Chronicle, 2010).

NFU rural surveyor, Louise Staples, said: *"We applaud the Marine Conservation Society's drive to highlight the dangers that Chinese lanterns can cause to wildlife. Our members have already seen first-hand how they can harm – or even kill – farm animals not to mention the fire risks to standing straw, thatch roofs and bales of hay and straw. It is vital that people throughout the UK realise this."* (Louise Staples pers. comm).

As well as the harm caused to livestock, other wildlife is at risk; a dead owl was found trapped in a sky lantern (BBC Gloucestershire, 2011). Glastonbury Festival boss Michael Eavis has also called for a nationwide ban on sky lanterns (BBC News Somerset, 2011).

Lanterns are typically constructed from oiled rice paper mounted on a bamboo or wire metal frame and contain a small candle or fuel cell composed of waxy flammable material. When lit, the flame heats the air inside the lantern, causing it to rise into the air.

Lanterns also pose a fire risk to crops in the summer months, thatched roof properties and are causing a number of false alarm call outs on the coast as people mistake them for distress flares.

According to the RNL's Head of Fleet Operations, Hugh Fogarty: *"2010 saw a significant increase in the number of lifeboat callouts to false alarms caused by Chinese lanterns and the RNL asks anyone planning to release them anywhere near the sea to contact the Coastguard and let them know beforehand"* (Hugh Fogarty, pers. comm).

Steve Dexter, Information Manager in Evidence, Analysis and Research branch for the Maritime and Coastguard Agency says: *"[Figure 5] represents calls to Her Majesty's Coastguard regarding the possible sighting or use of Chinese lanterns. These calls have risen over the past four years. Her Majesty's Coastguard recognize the increase in calls but it must be borne in mind the majority of these were either false alarms or genuine calls from members of the public to notify us of the intention to use lanterns so as not to confuse these with distress flares at sea or on the coast. Actual call outs were minimal."*

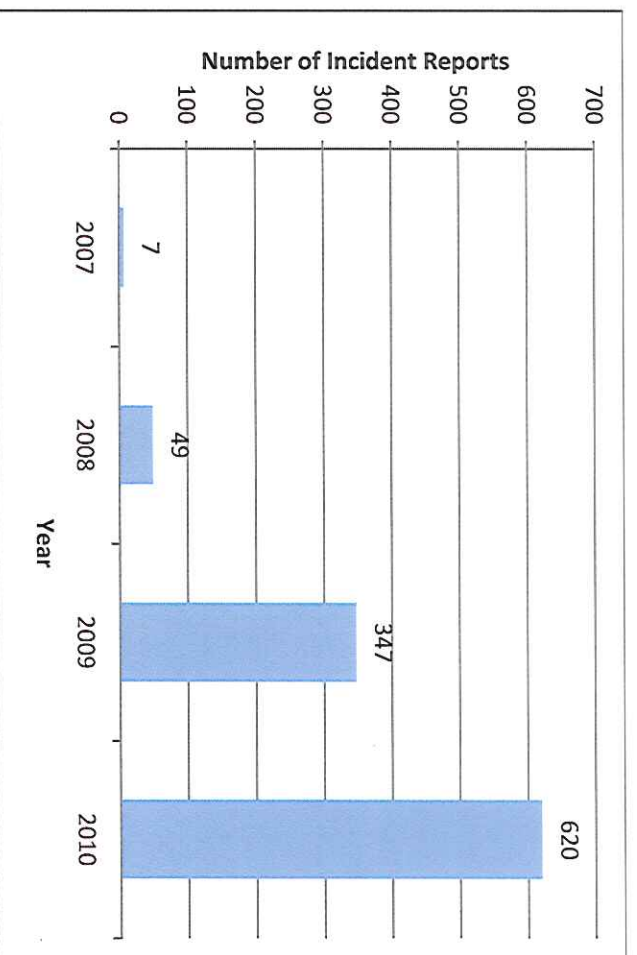


Figure 5: Number of calls received by HM Coastguard between 2007 and 2010 inclusive regarding the possible sighting or use of Chinese lanterns © HM Coastguard

There is also the threat of direct harm to people, as illustrated by a report in the Daily Mail when a three year old boy was burned by molten wax from a lantern on bonfire night (Mail Online, 2010).

It is illegal to launch a sky lantern in most parts of Germany, and in Austria it is illegal to produce, sell, or import them, or to distribute them in any other way (Bundesgesetzblatt, 2009). A permanent ban on sky lanterns that "rely on an open flame to heat the air inside the lantern" was made in Australia on 1 February 2011 (Product Safety Australia, 2012) and the release of sky lanterns has also been banned in Malta (timesofmalta.com, 2009) and Vietnam (Birando, 2012). Spain is the latest country to bring in a ban on sky lanterns (Farmers Guardian, 2012).

Lanterns can also pose a risk to aviation. The Irish Aviation Authority has produced an Aviation Safety document (IAA, 2011) asking members of the public to request permission in writing prior to their use. In addition, people are advised to contact the coastguard so lantern launches are not confused with a sighting of a distress signal.

A new Industry code of practice for releasing sky lanterns was commissioned by the Welsh Government and Defra in 2013 and whilst this is a step in the right direction, it is voluntary only. Due to the issues outlined in this PPPS, we would still like to see an outright ban on lanterns and balloons being released outdoors. (Welsh Government 2013). The NFU welcome the code but will continue to lobby for an outright ban until government action is taken.

As lanterns are contributing to the litter issue (we are starting to receive reports from Beachwatch organisers who are beginning to record lantern frames and whole lanterns on their beach litter survey forms) and pose a threat to marine wildlife, combined with the evidence presented from the MCA, RNLi and the NFU, we have extended our current position on balloons to include a ban on sky lantern releases.

6.6 Alternatives to Intentional Outdoor Releases of Balloons and Sky Lanterns

It is important to stress that MCS is not 'anti balloon', and neither are we attempting to stifle the public's fun at fairs, festivals and events. However, there are many viable alternatives to intentional balloon and sky lantern releases, and some of these have been listed in Appendix 4.

7 Policy Decisions

MCS is of the opinion that:

- 1) Intentional outdoor releases of balloons and sky lanterns are an act of littering and should be classified as such. What goes up must eventually fall back down to earth and/or sea, where it can either entangle wildlife, or be ingested if certain species confuse balloons/balloon fragments with food items (such as can happen with endangered marine turtles).
- 2) We are against any forms of litter entering the sea – either directly or indirectly – and, we do not distinguish between differing types of balloon material, the main types of which are latex (rubber) and foil (also known as mylar). Latex balloons, whilst biodegradable, may still persist in the marine environment for up to four years.
- 3) We are not against the use of balloons *per se*, and support their use when they are used and disposed of responsibly, but not released intentionally outdoors to add to the already significant amount of litter in the environment. We are aware of the potential for adverse

economic impacts on businesses that manufacture and distribute balloons, and are not recommending that balloon products are banned, only that balloons and lanterns are classed as litter and outdoor releases made illegal under existing legislation such as the Environmental Protection Act 1990 or the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005.

- 4) We do not wish to prevent fundraising events or spoil people's fun, and a number of alternative activities can still take place and be used to raise funds without the need to intentionally release balloons or sky lanterns into the atmosphere.
- 5) We do not see a problem with indoor balloon events taking place but recommend that balloons should be air-filled - this would ensure that should any balloons be accidentally released, they will not rise as far or be distributed over such a large area.
- 6) We are also aware that helium gas is a limited resource and therefore recommend that balloons should always be air-filled, thereby preserving limited helium supplies.
- 7) We are aware that balloons may also be used for research purposes, for example, weather balloons. We are not against the release of these, as we believe the number involved to be minimal compared to the current number of intentionally released helium-filled balloons for commemorative, social or publicity events.

In light of the above points, MCS has produced the following list of 'asks'

- MCS is asking UK administrations to recognise balloons and sky lanterns as a form of littering and ban all releases of outdoor balloons and sky lanterns
- MCS will continue to ask local authorities to ban all outdoor releases of balloons and sky lanterns on their land
- MCS is asking all individuals to use alternative ideas (such as those proposed in our Don't Let Go Action Pack and in Appendix 4) to releasing balloons or sky lanterns or to only release balloons indoors, ensuring they are air-filled

8 MCS's Actions

In order to make continuous progress towards achieving our asks, in 2012, MCS in conjunction with KWT and Welsh Eco-schools, presented an environmental business case to the Welsh Government to recognise outdoor balloon and sky lantern releases as littering. A petition, urging

the Welsh Government to ban all intentional outdoor balloon and lantern releases, resulted in the Welsh Environment Minister asking officials to collect further evidence on this issue and working with England, produced a report to which MCS provided evidence. The report, published in May 2013, highlighted a significant fire hazard posed by sky lanterns; particularly to crops and aviation. It also acknowledged the ongoing risk to coastal rescue services who are falsely alerted to call-outs when lanterns are mistaken for distress flares. The Minister for Natural Resources and Food has subsequently written to all Welsh local authorities encouraging them to bring in a voluntary release ban on council owned land.

In order to make continuous progress towards achieving the asks in the previous section, MCS will strive to:

- 1) Make similar asks of the Northern Ireland Executive, Scottish Government and the UK Government.
- 2) Work with local authorities to bring in release bans on council owned land
- 3) Work in partnership with other stakeholders who share similar ideals
- 4) Aid other charities and organisations in coming up with alternative ideas to balloon or sky lantern releases
- 5) Engage with the public and community groups to raise awareness of the issue and support them in getting balloon and sky lantern releases stopped, using the MCS Don't Let Go! campaign action pack

9 Important Note

MCS Policy and Position Statements (PPSs) are being developed in relation to the activities of the three work streams (Pollution, Fisheries and Aquaculture, and Biodiversity) of MCS's Conservation Department, and they represent MCS's views on issues at a particular point in time. It is recognised that these views may change to reflect changes in external factors (e.g. changes in the law, new evidence provided by research, changes in policy of UK administrations, etc). It should be understood, therefore, that MCS's PPSs are under constant review, and that previously held views may alter and lead to revised PPSs.

If you are in any doubt about the currency of this PPS, please contact MCS by either calling our switchboard on 01989 566017 or by writing to us at info@mcsuk.org. Please remember to quote the version number and date of issue of this PPS when you contact us.

10 List of Acronyms

CNEA	Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005
EPA	Environmental Protection Act 1990
ICC	International Coastal Clean-up
L(NI)O	Litter (Northern Ireland) Order
MCS	Marine Conservation Society
MMSC	Marine Mammal Stranding Centre
NABAS	National Association of Balloon Artists and Suppliers
PPPS	Pollution Policy and Position Statement

APPENDIX 1: UK Local Authorities with a balloon release (and/or lantern release ban)

English Local Authorities

- Braintree District Council
- Carlisle City Council
- Ipswich Borough Council
- Lancaster City Council
- Maldon District Council
- Oxford City Council
- Plymouth City Council
- Portsmouth City Council
- Redbridge Borough Council
- Reigate & Banstead Borough Council
- Rochford District Council
- South Hams District Council
- South Tyneside Council
- Swindon Council
- Thanet District Council
- Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council
- Wandsworth Borough Council
- Windsor & Maidenhead Council
- Worcestershire County Council

Scottish Local Authorities

- Aberdeen City Council
- Aberdeenshire Council
- Falkirk Council
- Highland Council
- Shetland Islands Council

Welsh Local Authorities

- Caerphilly County Borough Council
- Conwy County Borough Council
- Neath Port Talbot Council
- Pembrokeshire County Council

Northern Irish Local Authorities

- Belfast City Council
- Coleraine Borough Council

APPENDIX 2: Other Organisations that no Longer Support Balloon Releases or have Cancelled their Plans due to Intervention by MCS

Companies / Organisations

- Barclays
- Marks & Spencer
- Sainsbury's
- Norwich Union
- TGI Fridays
- The Midcounties Co-operative
- The Co-operative Group
- Guinness Book of Records

Charities

- The Association for Spina Bifida & Hydrocephalus
- Pancreatic Cancer UK
- Marillac
- The Fostering Network
- HUGs-UK Children's Charity
- RNLI
- NFU
- RSPCA
- WDCS
- KWT
- KBT
- Pentecost 2000
- British Red Cross, County Durham
- Llamau
- Children's Appeal Foundation
- Migraine Action
- Terence Higgins Trust
- Morris Bricknell Acorns Children's Hospice Trust
- Southampton Christian Network

- Cash for Kids Charity Balloon Race
- Meningitis Foundation
- Donor Family Network
- Damson Association
- Royal British Legion
- Helen and Douglas House Hospices
- Overgate Hospice
- St Wilfrid's Hospice
- Walk a Mile for Maude
- World AIDS day

NB This is not an exhaustive list.

APPENDIX 3: Useful Websites

- Keep Britain Tidy www.keepbritaintidy.org
- Keep Wales Tidy www.keepwalestidy.org
- Keep Scotland Beautiful www.ksbscotland.org.uk
- TIDY Northern Ireland www.tidynorthernireland.org
- National Farmers' Union www.nfuonline.com
- RSPCA www.rspca.org.uk
- RNLI www.rnli.org.uk
- MCA www.dft.gov.uk/mca
- Clean Virginia Waterways www.longwood.edu/cleanva/balloons.htm
- Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society www.wdcs.org.uk

APPENDIX 4: Alternative Ideas to Releasing Balloons or Sky Lanterns

- Prize balloon popping – Hide a few prizes inside air filled balloons. Release balloons indoors and let everyone pop them to find the prizes. Also works well with choosing raffle ticket winners.
- Balloon relay – Each member of a team has to run a short distance and sit on a balloon to pop it before running back to tag the next member of the team. The first team to pop all their balloons wins!
- Balloon sculpture – Use your balloons to make an unusual but fun sculpture or even a balloon arch.
- Balloon art – Hire a balloon artist to create balloon animals.
- Guess the number of balloons – Fill a car with balloons and the correct guess gets a prize (could you get the local car dealer to donate the car as a prize?).

Trying to raise lots of money without spending much? Try these events instead:

- Sponsored events – All it costs you is a sponsorship form. Find some willing individuals to do sponsored running, walking, swimming, pogo jumping... whatever you like!
- Auction – Ask people and local companies to donate prizes and hold an auction to raise money for your cause.
- Virtual balloon release – You can sponsor balloons, set them off from a precise location and track them online to see where they end up. Balloons travelling the world with no harm to the environment (just check the company doesn't also support actual releases!).
- Music concert – Support new local bands and host a night of musical entertainment. Tickets for the concert all go to your cause and musicians get a great chance to showcase their talent.
- Colour code yourself – Dress in green / blue / neon pink and donate money to charity, e.g. MCS's Big Blue Day to coincide with World Oceans Day on 8 June.

Balloons are often released to commemorate or raise awareness, here are some other ideas:

- Planting trees or flowers.
- A memorial bench.
- Lighting candles.

Need an event for kids?

- Paper plane competition (also works for adults – brings out the competitive side!), with a prize for the plane that travels the furthest.
- Plant a tree to mark a class leaving school.
- Get all the children within the same school year to make a clay or paint collage of their handprints – a beautiful, personal memento of the year.
- Easter egg or treasure hunt.
- Organise a kite fly – it looks spectacular and is cheap and fun to organise.

APPENDIX 5: References

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Balloons & Releases

Guidelines and Code of Conduct for Balloon Releases



Say "NO" To Balloon Releases. We strongly recommend our members instil a policy of "No Balloon Releases", and do not support the deliberate release of balloons. As the leading trade association, it is our constant goal to protect our members, our industry and indeed the end users and our environment.

- Don't Let Go
- Always Dispose of Balloons Safely
- Beware of Latex Allergies

Yes, we know under current legislation, balloon releases are legal, and we can only advise of the risks and dangers. We have asked the government to ban the release of Sky Lanterns, Foil Balloons and Any Balloon with Ribbons or Plastic Attached, and we will continue to press for this regulation. For those that insist on a release, please ensure they are fully aware of all the implications and share the guidelines below with them.

The Guidelines and Code of Conduct are designed for anyone who is planning a Balloon Release. We believe this should be strictly adhered to in the interest of safeguarding the environment.

[Our environment & latex balloons](#) [[#environment](#)]

[Code of Conduct](#) [[#codeConduct](#)]

[Guide to Balloon Releases](#)

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recommend that only a small balloon release should be attempted without professional assistance. Small being defined as anything up to 1000 balloons. This guidance is designed to minimize the risk of any potential danger to animals, sea creatures and the general environment.

What happens when a Balloon is released?

A scientific survey carried out in 1989 revealed that on release a balloon will float up to a height of approximately 5 miles and then it becomes brittle and shatters into miniscule pieces falling back to earth at a rate of circa one piece every 5 square miles. Problems can arise when a balloon is not inflated properly or fully or is carrying too much weight and therefore does not reach the height at which shattering occurs. This situation causes a potential danger to wildlife and the environment.

What can I do to reduce this risk?

The Balloon Industry has produced a Code of Conduct, with input from leading environmental organisations; you should follow this advice to the letter.

Conclusion

Balloon releases are fun, spectacular and fulfil a variety of promotional and fundraising objectives. However if best practice is not followed major problems can occur.

If you require any further clarification or need advice please contact NABAS, The Balloon Industry's only independent association on 01787 221026.

Applying for permission from the Civil Aviation Authority

It is a requirement that if you are releasing more than 5,000 balloons you must apply in writing for permission to the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) at least 28 days in advance of the release because balloons can



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A form can be obtained by calling the Airspace Utilisation Section of the CAA on 020 7453 6599

[] Our Environment and Latex Balloons

What are balloons made of?

There are basically two types of balloons, foil balloons and latex balloons. The foil balloons (often referred to as mylar), are a bladder made of nylon that is covered with a layer of aluminium that is 0.0015 of an inch thick. Latex balloons are made from the sap of rubber trees – a completely natural substance.



Are latex balloons biodegradable?

Yes. Latex is the product of rubber tree sap, it breaks down when exposed to the elements of nature.

How long does it take for a balloon to biodegrade?

Oxidation is the first step in the breakdown of a latex balloon and it begins within approximately one hour of inflation. Oxidation is visible in some types of balloons as a cloudy appearance. This is most evident when the balloon is exposed to direct sunlight, heat or normal outdoor conditions.

Research was carried out in July 1989 with a variety of balloons under various conditions to accurately gauge the time needed for the latex to degrade. Results from this study indicate that the decomposition time for balloons is about the same rate as an oak leaf (6 months).

Is it true that balloons have been found ingested by sea animals?

Some cases have been reported, but balloon fragments are unlikely to cause harm if accidentally ingested. This is because latex and the dyes used in latex colouring are non-toxic. However problems may occur if a partially inflated balloon is ingested, causing possible blockage of the alimentary tract.

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NABAS is very aware of its responsibilities to the environment. This Code of Conduct was produced to formalise the principles for balloon releases, which have long been the standard for the Industry. It is extremely important that everyone adheres to this code in the interest of safeguarding the environment.

1. Only natural latex rubber balloons will be used for Releases

Latex, being an organic product degrades naturally in the environment. Balloons made of any material other than latex and in particular foil balloons (often referred to as Mylar) should not be used for Releases.



2. All components used in balloon releases must be biodegradable

Balloons must be hand tied, plastic valves should not be used. Any attached labels must be of paper, preferably recycled.

3. Only helium gas should be used to inflate the balloons

Helium is an inert lighter-than-air gas. As the balloon rises, the gas expands until eventually the balloon bursts producing small fragments, which aid decomposition.

4. No ribbons or strings must be attached to the balloons

Ribbons and strings represent a potential problem and must never be used in balloon releases. Labels should be attached via the hand tied balloon knot.

5. Balloons must always be launched singly

Single balloons disperse easily and quickly. They must never be tied together in bunches for balloon releases.

6. Full approval must be obtained from the relevant authorities

Releases exceeding 5000 balloons should not take place unless they have been cleared in advance with all relevant air traffic and local

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7. Maximum balloon size

Balloons larger than 12" can not be released. It is forbidden to use balloons containing any metallic pigment.

8. All balloons sold near balloon releases must be weighted

Any balloons sold in the vicinity of a balloon release must be sold with a weight attached to ensure they cannot escape. Foil Balloons must never be released. Latex balloons with a plastic valve and ribbon must also be weighted.



Foil (Mylar) Balloons

All helium filled foil balloons should be attached to a suitable weight to ensure that they are not released into the environment

All helium filled foil balloons in a bouquet or arrangement should be individually tied to a weight

It is recommended that balloon professionals familiarise themselves with the Law in California relating to helium filled foil balloons. The following link shows the information on the International Balloon Association (IBA) website. [California Balloon Law \[https://nabas.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/California-Balloon-Law.pdf\]](https://nabas.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/California-Balloon-Law.pdf)

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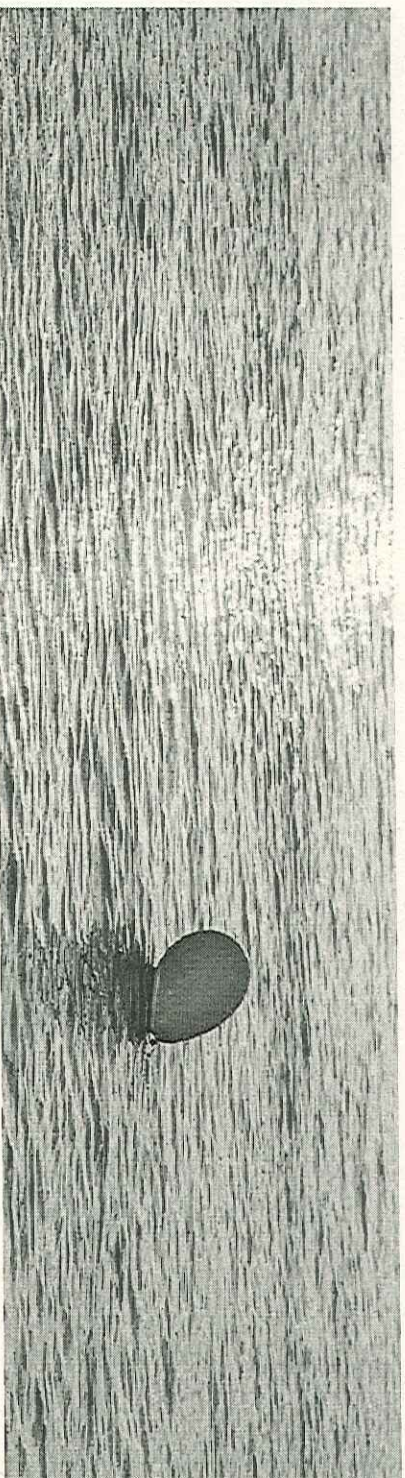
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#EndSkyLitter

Sky litter is a danger to animals. Email your local council today to urge them to implement a ban on the release of sky lanterns and balloons.

[Jump to action](#)

Sky lanterns

Also known as paper or Chinese lanterns, **sky lanterns are a danger to wildlife**

. Although the release of them are banned on Council owned land and property in Wales, it's still legal to release paper lanterns in England.

An estimated 200,000 sky lanterns are sold and released each year in the UK

. As the popularity of these items increase, so does the risk to wildlife. Sky lanterns can cause injury and suffering to animals and have a devastating impact on the environment. This site uses cookies to provide a great user experience.

There have been reports of animals becoming entangled in these lanterns and becoming injured trying to free themselves, which will cause extreme ~~stress~~ ^{stress} and suffering.

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A fire hazard to animals and the countryside

Sky lanterns also have a open flame to help them fly, which is a fire hazard to wildlife and can damage their habitats and the environment. During the dry summer months, this risk is increased as it's easier for grass and countryside to catch fire.

Balloon releases

Many balloons are released each year and although they make an impressive sight, when they land they pose a danger to animals and become litter.

In recent years there has been a great increase in the amount of

balloon litter

. Balloons are often

mistaken for food by both land and marine animals

, posing a big choking hazard for them. The strings and ribbons that are tied to balloons are also a threat and can cause animals, especially birds, to get tangled up in them.

The impact that balloons can have on animals can be fatal.

Counter-arguments suggest the use of biodegradable balloons and lanterns are a safe alternative, however, this waste is still a risk to animals and can take decades to degrade.



Take action for your local area

Releasing a balloon or sky lantern is a form of littering. Call on your local council to implement a ban on the release of balloons and sky lanterns on council land.

Forename *

Surname *

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