

# Balloon Releases

Decide for yourself



## What is wrong with balloon releases?

Organizations, communities, families and individuals from all over the world release millions of helium filled balloons into the air each year to celebrate or publicize some special occasion.

**Are all balloons the same?** There are two types of toy balloons: (a) "latex" balloons which are made either from natural or synthetic rubber, and (b) "foil" or "mylar" balloons which are made from a metal coated plastic such as polyethylene (PE) or nylon. Balloon releases almost always involve the release of the rubber latex balloons rather than the foil balloons mainly because the latter are more expensive.

### What happens to the balloons after they are released?

About 10% of released balloons don't burst; they float back down to earth. The rest rise up in the atmosphere where they tend to expand because the atmospheric pressure decreases. At a height of about 8km the volume increases to the point where the elastic limit of the rubber is reached. Moreover, the temperature (-25°C at this height) makes the balloon rubber brittle. The balloon fractures into several small pieces of rubber that float back down to earth and are scattered over a wide area with most of them ending in the seas.

### Why are stranded balloons dangerous?

Floating balloons are often mistaken for food by sea turtles, sea birds and marine mammals (i.e. whales, dolphins and seals). Once swallowed the balloon will block the digestive tract if swallowed and eventually lead to death by starvation. Strings, ribbons or other materials tied to the balloons are an added hazard as they can wrap around fins, flippers, and limbs, causing infection, amputation, or drowning.

**Do balloons ever go away?** Sunlight and weathering, exposure to water and exposure to soil degrade latex balloons in about 6 months when exposed to air but may take up to 12 months in seawater. In both cases that is still long enough to claim animals' lives and to litter the environment. The situation is made worse by any ribbons and cards attached to the balloons. Synthetic rubber and "foil" or "mylar" balloons are the worst as they do not degrade and remain in the environment. For these reasons, certain communities have enacted laws against balloon releases based on the fact that these releases are an act of littering and a threat to wildlife.

Visit <http://balloonsblow.org/> for more information about the issue, resources for the classroom and environmentally-friendly alternatives to balloon releases



This sea bird, entangled in a balloon ribbon, will die because it cannot fly, hunt for food and avoid predators. Visit <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6E3TeggKjUY> to watch a video clip on balloon releases.

Celebrate responsibly!  
Avoid hazardous waste!



What goes up ...

... must come down

