

Currently, many states and counties in the US have restrictions on balloon releases including Connecticut, New York, Florida, California, Virginia and Maryland. Most of these restrictions do not permit the release of more than 10 balloons in a 24-hour period. Even so, this is *not* enough to protect our waters and their inhabitants.

Many other areas around the world also have restrictions on balloon releases including parts of Australia and the UK.



What You Can Do

Avoid buying helium filled balloons

If using balloons outdoors, secure them tightly

When you attend an event with helium balloons, ask whoever has the balloons to stop selling or giving them away.



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April 2015



Explore, enjoy, and protect the planet

Mylar and Latex Helium Balloons



The Dangers of Mylar and Latex Balloons

The use of balloons at parties, carnivals, fairs, and promotional events has become widespread. Sometimes we see children walking with balloons. Balloons can be a fun addition to events, but they can be dangerous. If a balloon comes loose or is released, it flies high into the sky. It is estimated that balloons may reach heights of 5 miles in the atmosphere! But we must remember that what goes up must come down. As these balloons rise, they may leak helium and begin to float back down still in one large piece, or they may rise so high that they begin to freeze and shatter into smaller pieces which then fall back to the ground. In most cases, the string will still be attached to part of the balloon. The danger occurs when these balloons or pieces of balloons land over a water body where they may be mistaken for food by wildlife or when the animals get caught up in the attached string.

There are two types of balloons, mylar and latex. Latex balloons are the rubber balloons. They come in many colors and shapes. Latex balloons are usually made from the sap of a rubber tree, which is then combined with oils and dye to form the balloon. Because these balloons are made with a natural source of latex, they will break down over time, however they form a very sticky substance when exposed to salt water – one which combines seaweeds, rocks and strings in a knotted mass often mistaken for food by sealife.



Mylar balloons are the other type of balloon. These are large, metallic looking balloons that may come in many different shapes and may also have pictures or designs printed on them. These balloons are made from nylon sheets, which are covered in a metallic coating. Because of this, mylar or foil balloons will not break down in the environment.



Balloons are a significant threat to wildlife. In 2007, the Ocean Conservancy collected over 60,000 balloons worldwide

and listed balloons as the second most dangerous debris item. In early July 2011, in a half hour on Old Field Beach in Setauket, two people collected 295 pieces of debris amongst which were 8 pieces of latex balloons and one full mylar. Although some balloons may be advertised as bio-degradable, they may take several months and even years to break down and mylar balloons do *not biodegradable*. Tuna, shark, swordfish, and sea turtles feed on jellyfish and several species of sea birds pick symbiotic crustaceans from the jellyfish bells near the sea's surface, inevitably feeding also on the jellyfish hosts while dolphins feed on squid. Some of these creatures confuse the clear to milky white remnants of the mylar balloons (after the metallic colors have washed off) as food which they ingest. The indigestible balloons are known to get lodged in many animal's digestive tracts causing a blockage that leads to malnutrition, starvation, or death. Animals on land or at sea may also become entangled in the balloon's ribbon restricting their mobility (which affects their ability to get food and to escape predators).