

Releasing Balloons

What's the issue?

Balloons that are released into the air eventually come back down to earth and end up as litter, with the potential to harm the environment and animal life, in particular birds and marine animals. Keep Australia Beautiful WA does not endorse the releasing of balloons and encourages anyone considering doing so to seek an alternative method of celebration or commemoration.

What's the damage?



Balloons have similar effects to plastic bags and many dead animals have been found with the remnants of balloons inside them. Balloons and balloon fragments are often mistaken for food and swallowed, which can cause injury and death. The string attached to the balloon, can also be dangerous as they can strangle or entrap animals.

Birds have been found tangled in the strings of balloons making them unable to fly or search for food.

What about bio-degradable balloons?

Claims that balloons are bio-degradable are misleading. While natural latex may be biodegradable, the addition of chemicals and dyes in balloon manufacture can make balloons persist for many months in the environment. Balloons that are released into the environment, even for a short time can cause harm. Similarly, degraded remnants of balloon can be harmful to animals that ingest them. (Ref: <http://balloonsblow.org/latex-balloons-still-kill/>)

What's the law on releasing balloons?

Under the *Litter Act 1979* items become litter when they are deposited on land or waters, so while the action of releasing the balloons is not an offence, littering does occur when they land.

This is however, a very difficult situation to prove, as an authorised officer would need to witness the release of the balloon, then follow the balloon and see it fall to land to be able to issue an infringement. There is currently no other legislation in Western Australia addressing the mass release of balloons.

Other states of Australia have laws regarding the release of balloons. For example:

- In New South Wales, you cannot release more than twenty balloons at any one time.
- The Sunshine Coast in Queensland banned the intentional release of helium balloons into the atmosphere in 2011.
- In Tasmania, the idea of banning mass balloon releases has been considered, but no formal law against the mass release of mass balloons has been enacted yet.

Keep Australia Beautiful WA is well aware of the environmental damage helium balloons can cause and discourages the practice. Many large organisations that previously released balloons now choose other methods for celebration.

Environmentally friendly alternatives

Here are just a few ideas for alternatives to balloons to celebrate, promote and commemorate.

Plant or gift in remembrance: By giving seeds, seedlings or planting a native tree, or garden, you can provide shelter, food and clean air to wildlife in the area, while also providing a more permanent place of remembrance.



Flags, banners, streamers and dancing inflatables: These are an option for companies who are looking for some promotional, reusable signage. They save money and can be reused.



Bunting: Different types of bunting can be very eye-catching and a great way to rope off or highlight an area.



Lighting candles and luminaries: Candles made from environmentally friendly materials are readily available and provide an easy option to celebrate or commemorate. Luminaries can be placed along a footpath and can have messages attached to them, or designed to allow people to leave their message.



If you have some other alternatives to share, please email kabc@kabc.wa.gov.au.

For more information on alternative ways to celebrate and the dangers of balloon release go to <http://balloonsblow.org>