

# Protect our environment from balloon litter

## Transitioning away from Balloons

When there's a celebratory event or gathering, balloons are one of the first things that come to mind. The NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) understands that many of us mark life's milestones with balloons.



## Sorry to burst your bubble

Releasing balloons can lead to littering and mass releases could harm the environment and wildlife. Marine animals may swallow balloons blown or washed out to sea.

It is against the law to release 20 or more lighter than air balloons into the air together or at about the same time. The penalty can be \$1,100.

Releasing 100 or more balloons is aggravated – the penalty can be \$3,300.



## Releasing balloons can harm the environment and wildlife

Balloons can take years to break down. They may end up in waterways or the ocean, where they can be swallowed by marine animals. Turtles have even been found to selectively eat burst balloons because they look like jellyfish, their natural food.

Balloons, along with any ribbons or plastic disks attached, can harm animals by blocking their airways or becoming lodged in their intestines. Ribbons and strings from balloons can also become entangled around birds and other animals, making them unable to move.

Plastic ingestion by seabirds is common. Nearly half of all seabirds will eat plastic debris over their life. Studies have found that of all plastic pollution, balloons are most likely to kill seabirds.

## What are the alternatives?

There are lots of environmentally friendlier alternatives to balloons for marking life's milestones. Here are some other ways to celebrate:

- **Lighting candles.** The most important thing here is to make sure there is no fire risk.
- **Visual light displays.** Always eye-catching, but especially amazing at night. The sky really is the limit.

- **Bubbles.** Watching them catch the light as they float and bounce in the air can make for some memorable and pretty moments.
- **Music.** An audio celebration can be just as effective as anything visual and can evoke a whole range of emotions.
- **Flowers, or planting a native tree.** These will become ongoing celebrations that will grow with every year. Make sure you have the landowner's consent.
- **Kites or pinwheels.** The colourful sight of kites in the sky, twisting and chasing their tails or pinwheels flashing and spinning will stay in people's memories for a long time.
- **Ribbons.** Give everyone a long, colourful ribbon and get them twirling and dancing as the spirit moves them. Has the added benefit of providing exercise.

If the outdoor use of balloons is unavoidable, please follow these simple steps:

- Make sure they are strongly secured
- Choose biodegradable latex (rubber) balloons and natural strings
- Avoid using non-biodegradable mylar balloons (foil-coated)
- Ensure all balloons and accessories like clips and ribbons end up in the bin.



There are many alternatives to releasing balloons. All it takes is a little bit of imagination and creative thinking to make your event as environmentally friendly as it is memorable.

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#### Photos

1. Bunch of balloons against a blue sky, Photo: Punkbarby
2. Water-filled balloons littering a beach, Photo: Canetti
3. Human is blowing soap bubbles, Photo: Ritter75

#### References

[www.epa.nsw.gov.au/resources/warrlocal/150209-disposal-audit.pdf](http://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/resources/warrlocal/150209-disposal-audit.pdf)

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