

Position Statement

The Highland Council is opposed to balloon release on Highland Council premises, by Highland Council staff or at events endorsed by the Highland Council. This position statement also extends to the release of paper lanterns. Stakeholders in Highland will be made aware of the environmental consequences of balloon release and encouraged to follow the NABAS code of conduct for balloon release where alternative activities cannot be found.

Introduction

The impressive visual impact of balloons being released into the sky may last a few minutes, but the impact upon the environment and wildlife can last many months, with potentially harmful consequences.

After balloons are released they rise to high altitude where about 90% of latex balloons burst, undergoing what is termed „brittle fracture“. The balloon pieces then float back to earth over a large area. However, around 10% of balloons released will come back down to earth without bursting.

Releasing balloons at promotional and corporate events is not something that should be done without thinking of the consequences.

The Problem

The release of balloons could be viewed as littering under the Environmental Protection Act, 1990, which makes it an offence to deposit litter in public places. It is the responsibility of the Local Authority to ensure that public places remain free from litter and as such, Highland Council is fulfilling its statutory duties through the development of a position statement on balloon release.

Both whole balloons and balloon pieces can cause problems for marine animals. It is believed that they mistake balloons for their natural prey e.g. jellyfish and squid.

The effects of a seabird or marine animal swallowing a burst balloon, or becoming entangled in an attached ribbon, have been well documented by the Marine Conservation Society.

The following species, all of which occur in the waters off the UK, have been reported with latex balloons in their digestive system: Common Dolphin; Risso's Dolphin; Loggerhead Turtle; Leatherback Turtle; Blue Shark; Northern Fulmar.

In 2005, balloons and their ribbon and string accounted for 4% of entanglements of marine creatures recorded over a single weekend.

Paper lanterns pose a fire risk and although the paper element decomposes quickly, the metal framework can persist in the environment for some time posing a hazard to wildlife and farm livestock.

Action

- The Highland Council is opposed to balloon release on Highland Council premises, by Highland Council staff or at events endorsed by the Highland Council. "Balloon release" refers to the **intentional** act of releasing a balloon into the general environment.
- The environmental consequences of balloon releases should be promoted on the Highland Council website together with the policy statement, NABAS code of conduct and a list of alternative suitable activities.
- Where an independent organisation decides to carry out a balloon release in Highland they should notify the Council in writing, at least 28 days prior to the event, acknowledging that they are to follow the NABAS guidelines and code of conduct for balloon release.

Alternatives to Balloon Releases

Highland Council does not wish to prevent fund-raising events or spoil People's fun and a number of fun balloon activities can take place without the need to release them into the atmosphere. Some ideas include:

Balloon Popping Competition: Release the balloons in an enclosed area (e.g. church/school hall). Hide the prize tags in several balloons and children (and adults) rush around popping the balloons to find their prize. The burst balloons can then be easily collected and disposed of.

Balloon Animals: Prizes can be awarded for the best, biggest, most colourful, etc.

Round Up the Herd: For this game you will need a broom, 6 x 4 balloons (4 colours) and 4 „sheep pens". The aim of the game is to „herd" as many balloons as possible into the correct colour „pen" within the allotted time. One point is awarded for each balloon in the correct pen, with one point being deducted for a wrongly penned balloon and five point awarded for a full pen. The person with the most points wins.

Balloon Balance: Blow up about 10-15 balloons and place them on the floor. Each person has 2 minutes (use a timer) to pick up and hold as many balloons as possible. They must pick up the balloons all by themselves without help and put them in their clothes, between their legs, under their arms, between their teeth, etc. The person who holds the most balloons when their time is up is the winner.