

# Ban Balloon Releases

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 29 Ionawr 2024  
Petitions Committee | 29 January 2024

Reference: SR23/7337-4

Petition Number: P-06-1382

Petition title: Ban Balloon Releases

**Text of petition:** Balloon releases seem to be ever more common despite the harm they cause. They kill animals, litter and harm our environment. There are other less harmful ways people can honour lost loved ones. Even where bans exist, local authorities seem afraid to act on this.

## 1. Background

Balloon releases are usually done as part of a commemorative or celebratory event. However once the balloon is released it cannot be controlled, and becomes litter. Balloon litter can also pose a hazard to livestock and wildlife.

Research by Keep Wales Tidy explains that balloon litter can be mistaken for food, block digestive systems and cause animals to starve, and that string on balloons can entangle or trap animals.

Similarly, the Marine Conservation Society (MCS) says balloon litter can “be eaten by marine life, entangle turtles or sea birds and may result in premature death by choking, starvation or strangulation”. The Co-op Funeralcare highlights that whilst balloons made of plastic, rubber or foil will break down, “their particles can remain in the environment for decades”.



In October 2023 it was reported that a seal pup in North Wales died after being entangled in a balloon string on a beach.

A recent article by Natural Resources Wales highlighted the “unintended and severe consequences for wildlife and their habitats” from balloon releases:

Over the past year we have received several reports of balloon releases taking place on or near some of Wales’ Special Sites of Scientific Interest (SSSI). These are areas that provide habitats to some of our rarest and most threatened wildlife.

The MCS highlights that littering on the ground can result in a fine, however “letting go of a balloon or a lantern, which is just as problematic, isn’t treated in the same way”.

## 1.1. Local authority action

A number of Welsh local authorities have banned the release of balloons on their land. However it’s been reported that local authority officials are “wary of sending staff to confront those who are grieving because of the sensitive nature of the occasion”.

## 1.2. Alternative options

The Co-op Funeralcare and MCS highlight that ‘biodegradable’ or ‘environmentally friendly’ balloons can take years to break down in the environment. Both organisations give suggestions for alternatives to balloon releases including:

- Planting trees or flowers;
- Blowing bubbles;
- Wildflower seed bombs; and
- Lighting candles.

## 2. Welsh Government action

In response to this petition, the Minister for Climate Change, Julie James MS says she “does not believe introducing legislation to prohibit releases would be proportionate nor in the public interest”:

Rather, we continue to work with others to encourage alternative, more sustainable forms of commemoration as appropriate. For example, with our partners we promote commemorative woodlands as part of the Wales National Forest project. We have also previously written to several charitable organisations requesting they consider the wider impacts, for example littering, resulting from balloon releases at their events.

The Minister said the Welsh Government will continue to work with environmental organisations “to identify additional ways of raising awareness of the littering issues associated with balloon releases, accompanied by promoting alternatives to this practice whilst noting inherent sensitivities”.

### 3. Welsh Parliament action

In 2012, the fourth Assembly’s Petitions Committee received petition P-04-385, which called upon the then National Assembly for Wales to “legislate against the intentional release of balloons and Chinese (or air) lanterns into the air”. The petition was raised by the Cardiff Regional Eco-committee, a group of pupil-representatives from Cardiff Green Flag Eco-schools, and received 564 signatures.

The Petitions Committee contacted the responsible Minister, the then Minister for Environment and Sustainable Development, John Griffiths MS. In his reply, the Minister recognised the potential risks of balloon and lantern releases, and said that his department would develop an evidence base on the impact of lantern and balloon releases.

In a November 2023 written question, Darren Millar MS, asked whether the Welsh Government has considered “banning the release of balloons outdoors, given the adverse impact on wildlife and the environment”. The Minister for Climate Change answered:

The Welsh Government has no plans to introduce legislation to ban balloon releases.

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