

P-04-385 Petition regarding balloon and lantern releases

Petition wording:

We call upon the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to legislate against the intentional release of balloons and Chinese (or Air) lanterns into the air.

Petition raised by: Bryony Bromley

Date petition first considered by Committee: 1 May 2012

Number of signatures: 564

Supporting information:

The Cardiff Regional Eco-Committee (made up of pupil representatives from Cardiff Green Flag Eco-Schools) recently passed a motion to work towards legislation to prevent mass intentional Balloon and Chinese/ Air Lantern Releases due to the damaging effect that they have on wildlife, both on land and at sea.

Balloon Releases

There have been many cases of wildlife being discovered with latex balloons in their stomachs, blocking their intestinal tract: Marine species, particularly marine turtles and some sea birds, may mistake floating balloons for their jellyfish prey and swallow them, or become entangled and drown. Once swallowed, a balloon may block the digestive tract and eventually lead to death by starvation. The Marine Conservation Society (MCS) have carried out autopsies on a considerable number of marine wildlife that have been found washed up on beaches, confirming the results of balloon litter on the digestive tract.

The NFU has publicised the risk of grazing animals choking on balloons and in balloons contaminating hay, again posing a choking risk

(<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/agriculture/farming/8494881/Farmer-wins-compensation-after-Red-Nose-Day-balloon-kills-cow.html>)

Recent marketing campaigns have suggested that it is possible to carry out an 'eco-friendly' balloon release using biodegradable balloons able to decompose at the same rate as an Oak leaf.

- Oak leaves are very high in tannins and can take two years to fully decompose if not exposed to high levels of sunlight or water.

Following research in 2008, Keep Wales Tidy has stated that intentional balloon releases should be considered a form of littering. Since beginning to record balloon litter as part of their LEAMS surveys in 2008–09, Keep Wales Tidy has observed balloon litter in each of Wales' 22 local authorities. In one county balloon litter has been observed on 17% of streets.

The Marine Conservation Society has run campaigns to stop balloon releases, since 1996 and there are currently at least 23 authorities in the UK who have upheld a ban on mass balloon releases. Data shows that the amount of balloon litter found on Welsh beaches has unfortunately trebled over the last 15 years as the practice becomes more popular.

Approximately 10% of balloons released into the air fall back to earth intact. This figure is higher when the balloon is tied with plastic ribbons and tags.

<http://www.mcsuk.org/downloads/pollution/dont%20let%20go.pdf>

Chinese/ Air lanterns

The Marine and Coastguard Agency has warned of the dangers of Chinese lanterns, based on them being confused with distress flares.

The RSPCA has warned that the wire structure of lanterns could cause "extreme discomfort" to cattle if ingested.

The National Farmers Union has called for a ban on Chinese lanterns, owing to the danger posed to grazing animals.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-11265560>

Owing to the fire hazard, the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) recently warned people against releasing the lanterns, saying although they looked spectacular "once airborne they cannot be controlled".

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-13934378>

The Irish Aviation Association has highlighted the risk lanterns pose to aviation and is now demanding that permission be sought from them for any releases in the Republic of Ireland. They also insist that the nearest Air Traffic Control Unit, the Irish Coastguard and local Garda Station be informed.

(Publication by the Irish Aviation Association, Sky Lanterns and the risk to Aviation.)