

PERTH AND KINROSS COUNCIL

Environment Committee

21 January 2015

Policy on Mass Intentional Balloon and Chinese/Sky Lantern Releases

Report by Executive Director (Environment)

This report sets out the hazards posed by the mass intentional release of helium filled latex balloons and chinese/sky lanterns and the growing evidence of the damage they cause. Other local authorities and organisations, such as Keep Scotland Beautiful and the Marine Conservation Society, are supporting calls for bans of all such releases.

The report asks the Committee to adopt a policy of prohibiting intentional balloon and lantern releases on Council owned land and property, by Council staff, and at events endorsed or supported by the Council, including those on non-Council land. The policy is also designed to raise awareness of the environmental consequences of balloon and chinese/sky lantern releases.

1. BACKGROUND / MAIN ISSUES

- 1.1 The mass intentional releases of helium filled latex balloons and chinese/sky lanterns have increased in recent years. Although the release of these balloons and lanterns creates a visual spectacle, they pose hazards to wildlife and livestock causing injury and death. Lanterns can also cause injury to humans, damage to buildings and cause false callouts to the coastguard. For further information visit:
[http://www.mcsuk.org/what we do/Clean+seas+and+beaches/campaigns+and+policy/Don't+let+go+-+balloons+and+sky+lanterns](http://www.mcsuk.org/what_we_do/Clean+seas+and+beaches/campaigns+and+policy/Don't+let+go+-+balloons+and+sky+lanterns)
- 1.2 Twenty four local authorities in the UK now have balloon/ lantern release policies including Aberdeen City, Highland, Falkirk and Shetland Islands. Regional authorities in Canada, USA and Australia have banned balloon releases. Lantern releases are banned in Australia, Malta, Vietnam, Spain and most parts of Germany. It is also illegal to import or sell them in Austria.
- 1.3 Under section 87 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, it is an offence to throw down, drop or otherwise deposit, and then leave, litter. Local authorities have a statutory duty to enforce this Act, and have a responsibility to keep public open spaces free from litter.
- 1.4 Once a latex balloon has been released it can rise to a height of 5 miles, where the pressure and the temperature cause the balloon to undergo brittle fracture. The balloon pieces then float back down. However, 5-10% do not burst, and float back down whole and partially deflated. These balloons are often cited to “degrade as fast as an oak leaf”, which is reported as 6 months.

However, they can cause significant harm in these six months due to entanglement and choking by wildlife, and take considerably longer to degrade in the marine environment.

- 1.5 “Chinese” or “sky” lanterns are made of thin paper held by a wire or bamboo frame and lifted by heat from a naked flame. They pose similar choking threats to wildlife and livestock as balloons do and they also cause false callouts to the coastguard. They pose a fire hazard to dry standing crops, stacks of hay or straw, forestry and farm buildings, and thatched cottages.

Recent examples are:

- a recycling plant blaze in the Midlands (see link below)
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-23123549>
- and a caravan park fire in Worcestershire (see link below),
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-hereford-worcester-25100406>
both attributed to chinese lanterns.

- 1.6 The Marine Conservation Society (MCS), a registered charity, which promotes environmental responsibility towards clean seas and beaches, has been co-ordinating regular beach cleans and litter surveys, as part of its Beachwatch campaign, on beaches throughout the UK since 1994.

- 1.7 MCS is asking UK administrations to recognise balloons and sky lanterns as a form of littering and ban all releases of outdoor balloons and sky lanterns

- 1.8 In addition to MCS, Keep Scotland Beautiful, the National Farmers’ Union Scotland, the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds all support, and call for, bans.

- 1.9 Some of the organisations that have balloon release policies or have cancelled balloon release events are Barclays, Marks & Spencer, Sainsbury’s, Norwich Union, TGI Fridays, The Co-operative Group and Guinness Book of Records.

- 1.10 If a complete ban is not achievable, MCS are asking local authorities to ban all outdoor releases of balloons and sky lanterns on their land.

2. **PROPOSALS**

- 2.1 At present, any organisation that contacts the Council’s Waste Services, or hires recreational space from Community Greenspace, and plans intentional releases of balloons or sky lanterns, is advised that the Council supports the policy of Keep Scotland Beautiful (see Appendix 1) and tries to discourage this activity. However, there is no approved Council policy in place to prevent such activities.

- 2.2 It is proposed that Perth & Kinross Council join with an increasing number of local authorities in introducing a ban on the mass release of balloons and chinese/sky lanterns on Council property, Council-owned land, by staff undertaking council business and at Council endorsed or supported events, including those not on Council owned land.
- 2.3 The policy will raise awareness of the environmental consequences of balloon and chinese/sky lantern releases. This policy will be communicated to individuals and organisations booking Council owned sites for their events and activities.

3. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 The Report sets out the hazards posed by the mass intentional release of helium filled latex balloons and Chinese/sky lanterns and the growing evidence of the damage they cause.
- 3.2 Often the organisers of events with mass releases of balloons or lanterns are unaware of the issues. Approval of a policy prohibiting these items will raise awareness of the environmental consequences of balloon and chinese/sky lantern releases.
- 3.3 It is recommended that the Committee adopts a policy of prohibiting intentional balloon and lantern releases on Council owned land and property, by staff undertaking council business, and at events endorsed or supported by the Council, including those on non-Council land.

Author(s)

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Approved

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You can also send us a text message on 07824 498145.

All Council Services can offer a telephone translation facility.

1. IMPLICATIONS, ASSESSMENTS, CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

Strategic Implications	Yes / None
Community Plan / Single Outcome Agreement	Yes
Corporate Plan	Yes
Resource Implications	
Financial	None
Workforce	None
Asset Management (land, property, IST)	None
Assessments	
Equality Impact Assessment	No
Strategic Environmental Assessment	Yes
Sustainability (community, economic, environmental)	No
Legal and Governance	None
Risk	None
Consultation	
Internal	Yes
External	Yes
Communication	
Communications Plan	Yes

1. Strategic Implications

Community Plan / Single Outcome Agreement

- 1.1 The proposals relate to the delivery of the Perth and Kinross Community Plan/Single Outcome Agreement by reducing the local and global environmental impact of our consumption and production.

Corporate Plan

- 1.2 The Council's Corporate Plan 2013-2018 lays out five outcome focussed strategic objectives which provide clear strategic direction, inform decisions at a corporate and service level and shape resource allocation. These are as follows:
- i. Giving every child the best start in life;
 - ii. Developing educated, responsible and informed citizens;
 - iii. Promoting a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable economy;
 - iv. Supporting people to lead independent, health and active lives; and
 - v. Creating a safe and sustainable place for future generations.
- 1.3 This report contributes to objective (v).

2. Resource Implications

Financial

- 2.1 The proposals in this report have no financial implications.

Workforce

- 2.2 The proposals in this report have no workforce implications.

Asset Management (land, property, IT)

- 2.3 The proposals in this report have no Asset Management implications.

3. Assessments

Equality Impact Assessment

- 3.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, the Council is required to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between equality groups. Carrying out Equality Impact Assessments for plans and policies allows the Council to demonstrate that it is meeting these duties.
- 3.2 Due to the nature of the subject matter of this report there will be no differential impact on people with protected characteristics and therefore it is assessed as **not relevant** for the purposes of EqIA.

Strategic Environmental Assessment

- 3.3 The Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 places a duty on the Council to identify and assess the environmental consequences of its proposals.
- 3.4 The proposals have been considered under the Act and no further action is required as it does not qualify as a PPS as defined by the Act and is therefore exempt.

Sustainability

- 3.5 Under the provisions of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 the Council has to discharge its duties in a way which contributes to the achievement of sustainable development. In terms of the Climate Change Act, the Council has a general duty to demonstrate its commitment to sustainability and the community, environmental and economic impacts of its actions.
- 3.6 There are no direct impacts on Sustainable development as a result of these proposals.

Legal and Governance

- 3.7 The Head of Legal Services and the Head of Democratic Services have been consulted on the content of this report.

Risk

- 3.8 Risks associated with the proposals will be identified and managed through the Service project management processes and procedures.

4. Consultation

Internal

- 4.1 The Head of Legal Services and the Head of Democratic Services have been consulted on the content of this report.

External

- 4.2 Other local authorities and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service have been consulted in the development and application of this policy.

5. Communication

- 5.1 A communications plan will be developed to raise awareness of the harmful environmental consequences of balloon and chinese/sky lantern releases.

2. BACKGROUND PAPERS

There are no background papers to this report.

3. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Balloon & Flying Lantern Litter Statement – Keep Scotland Beautiful

Alternatives to Balloon & Flying Lantern Releases

Instead of just watching balloons & lanterns float away why not make an activity out of them:

- **Balloon Popping Competition.** Release the balloons in an enclosed area (such as a 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 then be easily collected and disposed of.
- **Balloon Animals.** Best done in teams. Prizes can be awarded for the best, biggest, most colourful, etc.
- **Balloon Surfing.** For the more radical, why not try balloon surfing! Inflate several balloons to about half size, and tie their ends. Place a small board over the balloons. See who can balance on the board without bursting the balloons. The winner is the person who stays on the board for the longest.
- **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 may 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.
- **Decorate a Hanging Lantern.** Rather than letting flying lanterns go, why not get together and buy some hanging lanterns and then spend time writing personal messages or decorating them with pretty patterns and pictures before hanging them in an outside space. This could be done to celebrate a wedding or other special occasion, or you could create a unique memorial garden.
- **Make your own lantern.** Have a competition to see who can make the most creative lantern. Each person draws window shapes on a piece of coloured card. Cut the shapes out and glue on coloured tissue paper to make windows. Roll the card into a cylinder and staple. Make two holes at the top & thread string/wool through to hang. These can then be hung around a room to make an attractive display.



Other Activities:

- Balloon decoration eg feathers, glitter, fabric
- Lantern decoration eg paint plain, round paper lanterns with pretty patterns
- Balloon modelling/sculptures/archways
- Make scarecrows/characters
- Balloon/lantern printing
- Outside, tie lit lanterns securely so you can still enjoy their beauty
- Table decorations

References

Marine Conservation Society - www.mcsuk.org

Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society - www.wdcs.org

National Association of Balloon Artists & Suppliers - www.nabas.co.uk

Keep Scotland Beautiful, 1st Floor, Strathallan House, Castle Business Park, Stirling, FK9 4TZ
Tel: 01786 471 333

e-mail: info@cleanupscotland.com Website: www.keeptoscotlandbeautiful.org

Keep Scotland Beautiful is a registered Scottish charity. Number SC030332

Keep Scotland Beautiful - Balloon & Flying Lantern Litter



Balloon & Flying Lantern Litter Statement



**Clean Up
Scotland**



**PART OF THE
Keep Scotland Beautiful
CHARITY**



Statement

Keep Scotland Beautiful is opposed to balloon and flying lantern releases. This applies to both mylar and latex balloons, to all types of flying lantern produced, and to large or small events.

Introduction



The impressive visual impact of thousands of balloons or flying lanterns being released into the sky may last a few minutes, but the impact upon the environment and wildlife may last many

months, with potentially harmful consequences. Releasing balloons or lanterns at promotional and corporate events is not something that should be done without thinking about the consequences.

Under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 it is an offence to drop 'or otherwise deposit' litter in a public place and it is therefore questionable whether balloon and flying lantern

releases with their potential for littering are within the law.

Balloons used in balloon releases are generally made from latex. A study on balloon persistence in the environment indicated that latex balloons degrade 'faster than an oak leaf' and this is often used in defence of mass balloon releases. However, an oak leaf in a cold water environment may take six months to break down and during this time the balloons can be carried hundreds of miles by sea breezes and currents.

Attachments such as ribbons and string tied to balloons are a particular problem as they can lead to the entanglement of birds and animals.

Flying lanterns can travel long distances on the wind, and some have a wire structure which does not degrade.



The Problem

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, and these whole balloons pose a particular threat to many animals on land and at sea.

Balloon litter found on beaches during the Marine Conservation Society (MCS) Beachwatch survey has shown a general increase since 1996. In the 2011 Beachwatch survey, a total of 951 balloons & balloon string were recovered, representing a density of 10.5 items/km surveyed and 0.5% of all litter picked up.

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 following species, all of which

Action

Whilst not wishing to prevent fund raising events or spoil peoples' fun, Keep Scotland Beautiful is calling on all organisations to support a voluntary ban on balloon and flying lantern releases and to celebrate or commemorate events in more environmentally-friendly ways.

Local authorities are asked to:

- Ban mass balloon and flying lantern releases at any event over which they have control
- Introduce a condition on Entertainment Licenses to prevent balloon and flying lantern releases

Individuals are also encouraged to take action.

occur in the North East Atlantic 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.

When flying lanterns float back to earth, their paper walls may degrade but some of these lanterns have wire frames, often covered with bamboo, which will remain. These pose a high risk to animals, especially with the bamboo coating, as livestock have been known to mistake them for food and then have ended up injured, sometimes fatally, after the wire has punctured their internal organs.

- If you become aware of a potential balloon or flying lantern release let the organisers know about their negative environmental impact, not everyone knows, and encourage them to look at alternatives.
- Write to your local council and ask them to consider banning mass releases from their premises and any premises or events licensed by them.

Corporate bodies who provide sponsorship or other support for charities or events are encouraged to decline to sponsor events involving mass balloon or flying lantern releases and to encourage alternative fund-raising activities.