



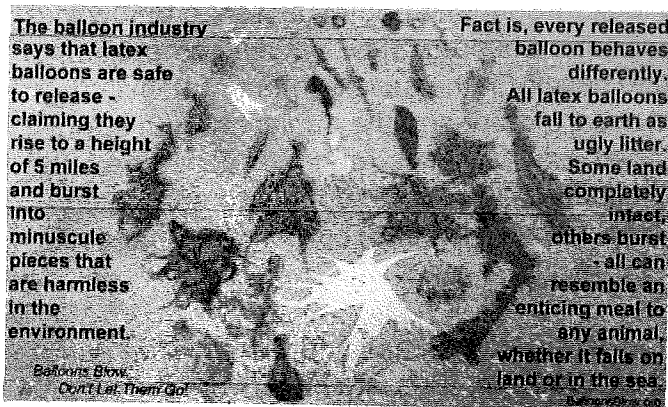
March 27, 2019

Good afternoon Senator Carson, Representative Tucker, and distinguished members of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee: my name is Melissa Gates, and I am the Northeast Regional Manager and a lobbyist for the Surfrider Foundation, operating our New England Regional headquarters in my town of residence, Cushing.

The Surfrider Foundation is a nonprofit environmental organization dedicated to the protection and enjoyment of the world’s ocean, waves and beaches through conservation, activism, research and education. Our Maine Chapter volunteers are beach goers, surfers, kayakers and the like who are active across several coastal issue areas, including protecting public beach access, protecting clean water, mitigating plastic marine debris, advocating for improved water quality, increasing ocean protections and advancing smart coastal preservation, climate change preparedness and adaptation strategies.

Today, I am representing the Surfrider Foundation Maine Chapter and our thousands of members and supporters across the state in offering support for LD937, an act Regarding the Sale and Release or Abandonment of Balloons.

The balloon industry claims that releasing balloons that are handtied and constructed out of so-called “biodegradable” latex without any attachments of ribbon are environmentally friendly.



Unfortunately, facts prove that this is a greenwashing marketing gimmick. The fact is that natural latex can be biodegradable on its own but after adding the necessary chemicals, plasticizers and artificial dyes required for balloon production, the natural degrading process is intentionally retarded by several years, leaving behind toxic chemicals in its wake.¹ This is further evidenced

by sewage treatment plant operators reporting that latex is one of several problem materials that are not affected by the biological treatment system.

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/1990/04/01/nyregion/l-balloons-effect-on-the-environment-867890.html>



Even if we could improve degradability, this would do nothing to safeguard wildlife and marine species from the immediate threats of entanglement, ingestion and suffocation presented by littered balloons and balloon accessories, such as strings.

Another false factual claim is that so-called "biodegradable" latex balloons take the same amount of time to decompose as an oak leaf does. This is very misleading; oak leaves are naturally occurring and durable, and can take four years to decompose while posing no threats to the ecosystem or wildlife, and in fact providing benefits. While oak leaves are natural and belong in the Maine ecosystem, the same is not true for balloons, which pose immediate threats to wildlife and the environment when littered. Many animals mistake burst balloons as food, causing intestinal blockage and death. The ribbons or string that are sometimes tied to balloons, biodegradable or not, will last years and can also entangle and therefore immediately endanger any animal that comes in contact with them.

Many balloon enthusiasts are in the balloon business, meaning that they profit from the sale of balloons and therefore often encourage people to disregard everything scientists, wildlife rehabilitators and conservationists are reporting about the impacts of balloons on animals and the environment, so they can continue to profit from balloon releases despite the untenable consequences. Mass balloon releases bring in big profits, but they do so at a cost far too high to Maine for us to maintain this toxic practice.

The pictures are the hard proof; just take a look through the photos attached below in Exhibit A, assembled by the nonprofit organization *Balloons Blow*, whose compilation of scientific facts and data have been leveraged heavily in the development of this testimony. These photos do indeed paint the real picture and the unbiased truth about littered balloons. Each balloon is photographed exactly as it is found for documentation of its condition and location, before it is collected. Balloons are found littered in every stretch of our environment, and are pulled from necropsies and found entangling dead wildlife.

Alternatives exist for balloon enthusiasts to diversify operations and thereby maintain profits in ways that do not harm our shared environment for marginal private profits. From flags, banners, streamers and dancing inflatables or ribbons to lighting candles, blowing bubbles, garden plantings, paddle outs, pinwheels and garden spinners; there are many ways to commemorate special events and conduct honorary ceremonies that can still turn significant profit while not harming and killing wildlife or polluting our environment. Additionally, LD937 would not prohibit balloon use or sale, but would instead prohibit the intentional littering of our environment caused by balloon release.



Please do not take what you may hear or read from balloon enthusiasts who are profiting off from harming our shared environment to be fact. When they tell you balloons biodegrade, remember that they may break down eventually after many years, but they do not truly "biodegrade." When they tell you balloons pop into tiny little harmless pieces or that balloons do not impact wildlife, look at the pictures that prove these assertions untrue. We know the truth is that balloons kill and injure many different species on land and sea.

As more correlative data presents connecting balloon release to significant negative impacts to wildlife and marine species, more and more Maine towns are deliberating local regulation to ban or mitigate intentional balloon release. From Kennebunk to Unity, Mainers are paying attention and asking for action at the state or federal level.

Many states have already banned or mitigated the intentional release of balloons and sky lanterns, including California, Connecticut, Florida, Tennessee and Virginia. It is time for Maine to step up and protect our environment from this needless pollution.

The Surfrider Foundation extends thanks to Representative Devin for bringing forth this important bill in an effort to help protect Maine's environment and wildlife from the serious threats of intentional balloon release.

Thank you for your consideration of an Ought to Pass vote.

Sincerely,

Melissa Gates
Northeast Regional Manager
Surfrider Foundation

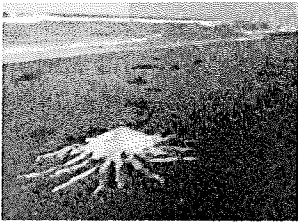
EXHIBIT A. Photos of littered balloons collected by Balloons Blow.



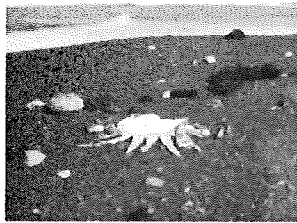
Latex Balloon



Latex Balloon



Latex Balloon



Latex Balloon



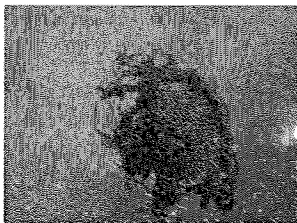
Latex Balloon



Latex "Squid"



Shredded latex balloon



Blue "jelly" balloon



Latex Balloon



Pink jelly (with nibbles)