

BALLOON ALERT

Balloons are perceived as a celebration of life: The birth of a child, grand openings, fairs, birthdays, get well wishes, and anniversaries, among others.

But for marine animals, balloons may mean death, as do other forms of plastic. Balloons are ingested by whales, dolphins, turtles, seals, fish and water-fowl, who innocently believe they are food such as jellyfish or squid.

A young sperm whale was dying when it stranded on a New Jersey beach. A balloon had had lodged in its stomach, preventing the passage of food.

A leatherback turtle (which is an endangered species) starved to death because a latex balloon halted passage of food to its stomach. The only thing found in its intestines during a post mortem was three feet of nylon string attached to a balloon.

These are only two graphic examples of the thousands of animals killed every year by balloons.

ONCE YOU KNOW BALLOONS BRING DEATH, YOU CAN ACT.

Stores and fairs, such as art fairs, can use colorful windsocks for eye appeal and they are reusable. This would be especially meaningful in a waterfront community. New parents could be sent a potted plant or a tree could be planted in the baby's name.

Flowering plants and bulbs could be planted to spell out a message.

Children could have a kite-making class and kites are a reusable alternative to balloons. Balloons can be launched indoors in imaginative ways. Schools could have alternative celebrations to balloon launches. If your school plans a launch, tell them you don't want to endanger animal life and suggest alternatives.

Peter and Susan Hibbard of BALLOON ALERT PROJECT tell of a school that launched balloons in a library. Each balloon carried the name of a student and the last balloon to fall won a prize for the card owner.

If you DO use balloons, dispose of them properly. Never let balloons loose into the atmosphere. Even balloons released inland can travel incredibly far and end up in the oceans.

Spread the word to your friends. This is an easy way for an individual to make a difference and help ocean life.

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