

Date: January 23, 2020

Bill: Senate Bill 28, Solid Waste Management- Prohibition on Releasing a Balloon into the Atmosphere

Position: Support

Dear Chairman Pinsky and Members of the Committee:

The National Aquarium respectfully requests a favorable report for **Senate Bill 28, Solid Waste Management- Prohibition on Releasing a Balloon into the Atmosphere**, which will reduce the harmful impact plastic balloons can have when released into the environment while increasing public awareness of plastic pollution.

An estimated 8 million metric tons of plastic enters the ocean each year; that is equivalent to at least one dump truck full of plastic entering the ocean every minute. If current practices continue, plastic in the ocean could outweigh fish by 2050. Once in the environment, plastic debris breaks down into smaller pieces, but they never completely disappear. This plastic debris, including balloons, is a hazard for wildlife and habitats, as animals may confuse plastic pieces for food.

In 2004, the National Aquarium was proud to support a similar bill in the General Assembly named the “Inky bill,” after a pygmy sperm whale that was found critically ill on a New Jersey beach. The U.S. Coast Guard transported the young whale to a hospital pool at the National Aquarium where our medical team was able to extract foreign material lodged in her stomach—including mylar balloons and other various types of plastic.



Caption: Balloons collected from Maryland beaches.

Once released, balloons can stay in the air for up to two weeks, traveling hundreds of miles, and are easily caught in ocean currents that take them far beyond the Chesapeake Bay. To this day, released balloons have been recovered as far as 45 miles off the coast of Maryland.

By passing SB 28, Maryland will reduce the amount of harmful plastic entering waterways and littering communities, while protecting the health of the people and marine animals living there. **We urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on SB 28.**

Contact:

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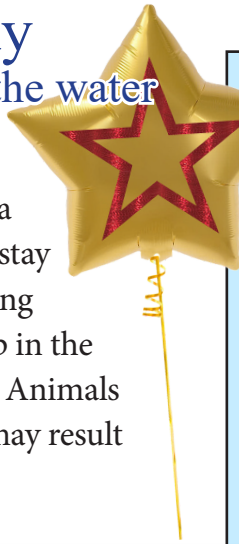
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Mylar Balloon Study

what goes up, may come down in the water

Releasing a Mylar balloon may seem harmless, but these balloons present a serious threat to sea turtles, dolphins and birds. Mylar balloons can stay in the air for more than two weeks while traveling hundreds of miles. Often, these balloons end up in the ocean, where animals confuse them with food. Animals may also become trapped or entangled which may result in drowning or starving to death.



Captain Mark Sampson

For the last 20 years, Captain Mark Sampson, a charter captain out of Ocean City, Maryland, has recorded the location of every Mylar balloon he has come across in the ocean.

Capt. Sampson found an average of 18 Mylar balloons per year, most in May and June. This suggests that balloons released during graduations and weddings may be responsible for a large portion of Mylar balloons in the ocean.

Most balloons were found many miles from shore, with some nearly 45 miles off the coast. At this distance, Mylar balloons could easily be picked up by ocean currents and carried thousands of miles away.

This information is the first of its kind in Maryland as beach cleanups were formerly the only source of information on Mylar balloon pollution.

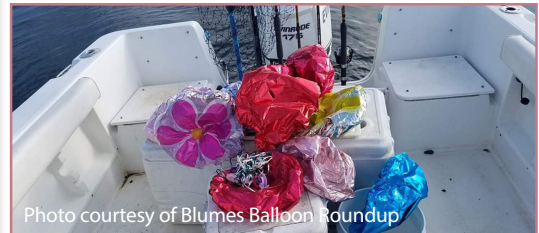
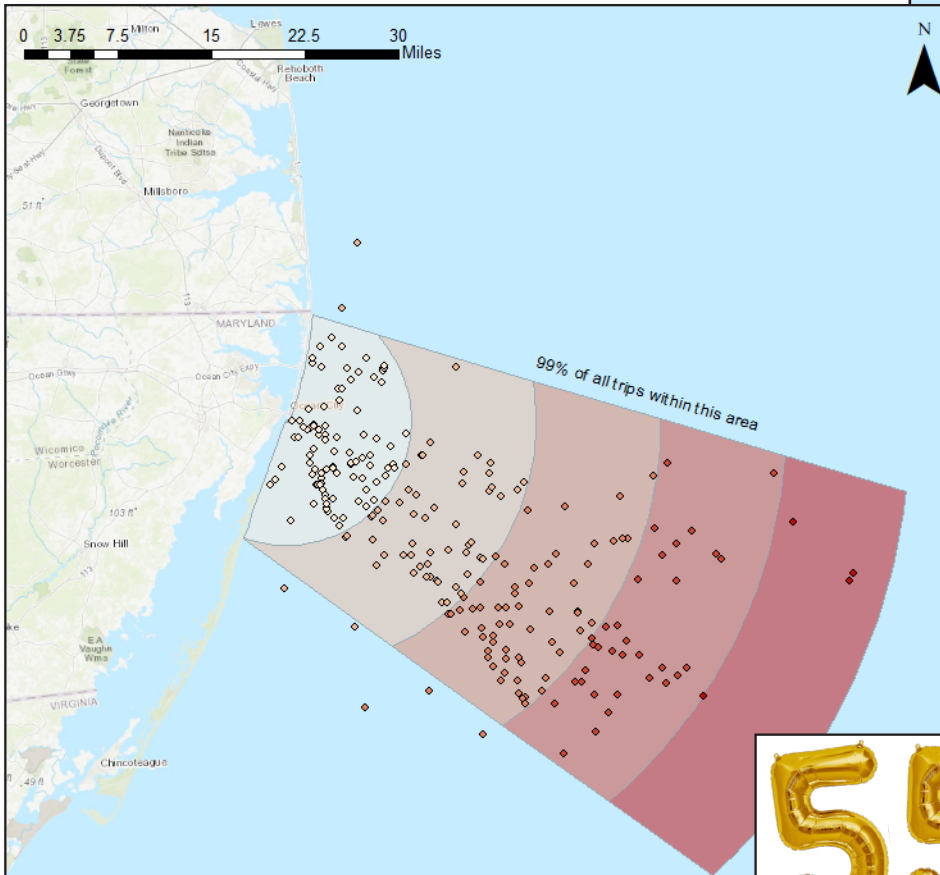


Photo courtesy of Blumes Balloon Roundup

- Never release balloons into the air.
- Choose to celebrate occasions without balloons.
- Pick up any balloons you find.
- Dispose of balloons properly.
- Educate your friends and family about the danger of balloon releases.

Mylar Balloon Sighting Distance From OC Inlet	
◇ < 10 Miles	□ < 10 Miles
◇ 10 - 20 Miles	□ 10 - 20 Miles
◇ 20 - 30 Miles	□ 20 - 30 Miles
◇ 30 - 40 Miles	□ 30 - 40 Miles
◇ 40 - 50 Miles	□ 40 - 50 Miles

