



Assateague Coastal Trust - PO Box 731, Berlin, MD 21811 - 410-629-1538

House Bill 13 – Solid Waste Management - Prohibition on Releasing a Balloon Into the Atmosphere

Committee: Environment and Transportation

January 29, 2020

Position: SUPPORT

Dear Chairman Barve and members of the Committee;

Assateague Coastal Trust(ACT) strongly urges this Committee to support HB0013, protect our ocean and land from further plastic pollution damage, and move this bill out of Committee with a favorable review.

ACT's Assateague COASTKEEPER program monitors the coastal waterways of Maryland and hosts the Trash Free Assateague project that is raising public awareness about plastic pollution by escorting volunteers, businesses and visitors on to the northern tip of Assateague Island National Seashore to witness first hand (and help to clean up!) the excessive amount of debris that floats ashore there. Balloon fragments, often with ribbons attached, are not an uncommon find among the straws, Styrofoam cups, plastic bottles, carry out containers and other debris that has floated on to the island.

On one occasion Billy Weiland, Project Manager of Trash Free Assateague, found a tied together inflated bunch of black balloons wedged in to the rock jetty on the south side of the Ocean City inlet. Could these have been intentionally released at an outdoor memorial service or 50th birthday party?



Emma Tonge, communications director for the Marine Debris Program at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, said researchers in Australia recently suggested that balloon fragments and debris might “be among the most harmful to sea birds, turtles and marine mammals.”

Researchers working with NOAA monitoring five uninhabited Virginia coastal beaches, discovered that balloon fragments were the most prevalent type of debris.¹

ACT has been helping to conduct the Ocean Conservancy International Coastal Clean Up for over 15 years on Assateague Island, sending collection data to Ocean Conservancy. During a nine-year period ending in 2016, the International Coastal Cleanup program found an average of 31,000 balloons on U.S. beaches each year.

Assateague Island National Seashore prohibits balloons in the park, yet in 1990 volunteers for the International Coastal Cleanup picked up nearly 30 lbs of balloons off the Virginia ocean beach portion of the island. They found that the balloons came from 52 sources in six states.

We urge this Committee to give a favorable review to HB0013 and help us ban the intentional release of balloons into the environment. For the sake of the health of our waterways, our ecosystems and our communities let's make sure balloons don't become litter.

Thank you for your consideration of these observations and comments.

Respectfully,



Kathy Phillips
Executive Director/Assateague COASTKEEPER
Assateague Coastal Trust

¹ Balloon Litter on Virginia's Remote Beaches Results of Monitoring from 2013 through 2017, A report from Clean Virginia Waterways of Longwood University to the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program for the FY16 Task 94.03 Grant August 2018