

## **Balloon Litter Bill – Delegate Guy - HB 507**

We have extensive data documenting the prevalence of balloon litter on Virginia's coastal beaches and inland state waterways. We also have extensive data regarding how dangerous balloon litter, both the balloon and the fastener and ribbon, are to our wildlife, livestock, and power lines.

During a four year, state-wide study of marine debris on the coastal beaches of Virginia, balloons were the most common item recorded on two of the four beaches studied. From June 2013-November 2017, surveys were conducted on Virginia's remote, uninhabited barrier islands. Forty-six surveys were conducted on more than 110 linear miles of remote beach, resulting in more than 11,000 balloons and pieces of balloon related litter. During some of these surveys, more than 150 balloons and balloon parts were recorded per mile of beach. Balloons were among the top three forms of litter observed. This is not a small problem.

Balloon litter injures and kills wildlife and livestock. More than thirty animal species are known to be impacted by balloons. The Virginia Aquarium's nationally recognized marine animal stranding response team has documented numerous balloons ingested by endangered sea turtles and marine mammals. And these are just the animals who die and whose bodies wash up on our Virginia beaches. The extent of the harm to wildlife including birds is widespread and well documented.

Currently in Virginia it is legal to release up to 49 balloons of any type within a one hour period (Virginia State Code: 29.1-101.1). Released balloons are a particularly insidious form of litter because of the ease with which they travel great distances and impact even remote areas.

Delegate Guy's bill does not ban balloons or the sale of balloons. It simply prevents the intentional outdoor release of balloons into the environment and treats intentional balloon releases like all other litter with the same fines imposed for other intentional littering. Virginia's current law regarding balloon releases is outdated and needs to be changed to prevent further environmental impacts and serious injuries to wildlife.

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Lynnhaven River NOW  
Karen Forget  
Karen@lrnow.org  
757-962-5398

Virginia Conservation Network  
Pat Calvert  
Pat@vcnva.org  
434.484.0804