

Policy Template

Policy Title

INTENTIONAL BALLOON AND CHINESE/SKY LANTERN RELEASES.

Summary Table

Policy Status (circle as appropriate)	<i>Approved and finalised</i>
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Policy Sponsor	<i>Maureen Corley, Planning Services Manager, Planning and Environment</i>
Authorised by	<i>Infrastructure Services Committee</i>
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1. Policy Statement

1.1. Introduction

- 1.1.1. The mass intentional releases of helium filled latex balloons and Chinese/sky lanterns have increased in recent years. These balloons and lanterns pose hazards to wildlife and livestock causing injury and death. Lanterns can also cause injury to humans, damage to buildings and cause false callouts to the coastguard.
- 1.1.2. Under section 87 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 it is an offence to throw down, drop or otherwise deposit, and then leave, litter. Local authorities have a statutory duty to enforce this Act with fixed penalty notices and have a responsibility to keep public open spaces free from litter.
- 1.1.3. This Policy Statement sets out the hazards posed by these mass releases and examples of incidents. Alternatives to balloon and lantern releases, and support for a ban from other local authorities, companies and organisations are also provided.
- 1.1.4. This Policy Statement covers all balloon and lantern releases on Aberdeenshire Council owned property and land, by Aberdeenshire Council employees and at Aberdeenshire Council endorsed or supported events, including those not on Council owned land.

1.1.5. Within this policy the term “release” refers to the intentional act of releasing a balloon or lantern into the general environment.

1.1.6. Within this policy the term “balloon” refers to any inflatable flexible bag filled with gas, such as helium, hydrogen, nitrous oxide, oxygen or hot air made from materials such as rubber, latex, natural latex, paper, polychloroprene, foil, mylar or a nylon fabric. This includes all biodegradable balloons.

1.2. Balloons

1.2.1. Once a latex balloon has been released it rises to a height of 5 miles where the pressure and the temperature cause the balloon to undergo brittle fracture. The balloon pieces then float back down but 5-10% do not burst, and float back down whole and partially deflated. These balloons are often cited to “degrade as fast as an oak leaf”, which is reported as 6 months. However, they can cause significant harm in these six months by entanglement and choking, and take considerably longer to degrade in the marine environment. ⁽¹⁾

1.2.2. The following species, all of which occur in the waters off the UK, have been reported with latex balloons in their digestive system: Common Dolphin, Risso's Dolphin, Loggerhead Turtle, Leatherback Turtle, Blue Shark and Northern Fulmar. ⁽¹⁾ Common Dolphin, Risso's Dolphin and Northern Fulmar are all present off Aberdeenshire coasts.

1.2.3. The Marine Conservation Society co-ordinate regular beach cleans and litter surveys, as part of their Beachwatch campaign, on beaches throughout the UK on the third weekend of September. In 2005, balloons and their ribbon and string accounted for 4% of entanglements of marine creatures recorded over a single weekend. ⁽²⁾

1.2.4. Members of Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service have led Beachwatch events on Aberdeenshire beaches since the 1990s. Results from Balmedie since 1996 show that anything between 6 and 106 balloons or balloon pieces have been found in one survey. The average number of balloons and balloon pieces found on UK beaches on Beachwatch surveys almost tripled in 2011 when compared to figures in 1996. ⁽¹⁾

1.2.5. Balloons can also cause a choking hazard for livestock as the pieces of balloon, ribbon, string and plastic holder cups fall into grazing fields or fields of hay or straw which are subsequently ensiled.

1.3. Lanterns

1.3.1. “Chinese” or “Sky” lanterns are made of thin paper held by a wire or bamboo frame and lifted by heat from a naked flame. They pose similar choking threats to wildlife and livestock as balloons do and they also cause false callouts to the coastguard. They pose a fire hazard to dry standing crops, stacks of hay or straw, forestry and farm buildings, and thatched cottages. Recent examples are the recycling plant blaze in the Midlands and a caravan park in Worcestershire, both attributed to lanterns. ⁽³⁾

1.3.2. In Scotland, NFUS staff and members have reported finding lantern remains on or near farmland in Renfrewshire, Bute, Aberdeenshire, Wigtownshire and near Edinburgh. While injury to animals or damage to property has yet to be reported in Scotland (there have been cases in England), the fear with NFUS is that this is just a matter of time. ⁽⁴⁾

1.3.3. Remains of lanterns were found on Forvie NNR in summer 2013.

1.4. Practice of Other Authorities

1.4.1. 84 local authorities in the UK now have balloon/ lantern release policies including Aberdeen City, Highland, Angus and Dundee. Regional authorities in Canada, USA and Australia have banned balloon releases. Lantern releases are banned in Australia, Malta, Vietnam, Spain and most parts of Germany, and it is also illegal to import or sell them in Austria.

1.4.2. Keep Scotland Tidy, the National Farmers Union Scotland, the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Marine Conservation Society all support and call for bans.

1.4.3. Some of the organisations that have balloon release policies or have cancelled events are Barclays, Marks & Spencer, Sainsbury’s, Norwich Union, TGI Fridays, The Co-operative Group and Guinness Book of Records.

1.5. Alternatives

1.5.1. Many balloon and lantern release events are planned for fundraising and celebrations. Aberdeenshire Council can offer alternatives whilst enforcing the ban.

1.5.2. The Marine Conservation Society has provided alternatives: Flags, banners & pop-ups – When budgets are tight many businesses are realising the benefits of using reusable eye-catching signage. Colourful streamers, flags, banners and other

signs save money and time over balloons, string, helium and lanterns.

Balloon sculpture - Turn balloons into something stunning with a hired-in balloon artist or try your own.

Virtual balloons & races - Virtual balloon race are where you can design and personalise your balloon and then track it on Google maps.

Pop a balloon - Put a raffle ticket in a few balloons before blowing them up...let them go (indoors) and ask people to pop them...the raffle ticket indicates the prize.

How many? - Fill up a car with blown up balloons and then get people to guess how many there are. The closest guess wins a prize.

Chinese lanterns – can still be enjoyed if tethered by a fishing line.

1.6. References:

1. Marine Conservation Society Pollution Policy and Position Statement: http://www.mcsuk.org/downloads/pollution/beachwatch/MCS_balloons_and_chinese_lanterns_policy.pdf
2. Entanglement: <http://www.keepsotlandbeautiful.org/media/58556/balloonlanternstatement2013.pdf>
3. Midlands fire: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-23123549>
4. Worcestershire fire: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-hereford-worcester-25100406>
5. NFUS: <http://www.nfus.org.uk/news/2011/january/happy-lantern-free-chinese-new-year>

2. **Scope**

- 2.1. All intentional balloon and lantern releases on Council owned land and property, by Council staff, and at events endorsed or supported by the Council, including those on non-Council land, will be prohibited.
- 2.2. Aberdeenshire Council will raise awareness of environmental consequences of balloon and Chinese/sky Lantern releases and promote alternatives.
- 2.3. It is the responsibility of all Services to comply with and implement this policy as appropriate to their Service.

3. **Principles**

- 3.1. Mass releases of balloons or lanterns can make an impressive sight but pose hazards to wildlife, livestock, humans and property.
- 3.2. They are on the increase, often for fundraising, commemorative or celebratory events.

- 3.3. Evidence is growing of the damage they cause and Aberdeenshire Council has joined an increasing number of local authorities in adopting a policy banning all such releases on Council property, Council owned land, by Council staff and at Council endorsed or supported events, including those not on Council owned land.
- 3.4. Often the organisers of these events are ignorant of the issues so this policy should be publicised as fully as possible, to maximise awareness.
- 3.5. It is hoped that publicising the policy and promoting alternatives will also lead to a reduction in smaller scale private releases, especially of lanterns, as the public become more aware of the dangers they pose.

4. Related Links

Infrastructure Services Committee Papers and & Minute:

<https://committees.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/Committees.aspx?commid=7&meetid=12094>

5. Index of Documents

a) Policy

Revision Date	Previous Revision Date	Summary of Changes

b) Distribution

Name	Title