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PRESS RELEASE

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Balloons - a much loved product

Balloons are a fun and safe product and have been enjoyed by young and old for many generations. However recent media coverage suggests that balloons are harmful to animals and the environment. Some activist groups go so far as to suggest a partial ban on balloons. The European Balloon & Party Council (EBPC) works closely with key industry players to promote the safe and responsible use of balloons and has put together this information sheet so that the facts can be fairly represented.

1. Do balloons kill animals?

The simple answer is ‘no’ but *litter* can cause harm to animals. However, of the total 146 cases that have been identified since 1885 of animal deaths with some mention of balloons in the autopsy, only 6 cases confirm the cause of death as a balloon.

2. Balloons are ‘plastic’

Plastics are derived from propylene whereas balloons are made from natural rubber latex. There is no fixed timescale to determine biodegradability and different materials biodegrade at different rates. An independent test in a specialist Belgian laboratory has provided evidence that latex balloons are biodegradable. These tests were performed to an international standard without UV or Ozone exposure; the worst case scenario. Ongoing tests will show how UV and Ozone will speed up the degradation process and provide evidence for the average length of time a latex balloon takes to degrade.

3. Balloons Releases & The Environment

Over 95% of balloons are purchased for celebrations such as birthdays and weddings or for corporate events and they usually end their lives in disposal mechanisms. DEFRA, a department of the UK Government, has found that only 0.5% of all beach litter content is balloons¹, as referenced from the Marine Conservation Society report.

The EBPC does not encourage or promote balloon releases accepting that balloons used for this purpose cause litter to a certain degree. However, neither the EBPC nor DEFRA have found evidence that balloon debris is a major hazard to marine or land animals and birds.

Professionals who do choose to release balloons are governed by a strict code of conduct that, amongst other stipulations, prohibits the use of plastic valves or ribbons, thus the majority of balloons will fracture, before returning to the ground as harmless spaghetti-like strands.

In 2016 The EBPC launched a Code of Best Practice² campaign that will reach out to consumers as well as those in the industry. This is the first campaign of its kind in Europe and will encompass the safe enjoyment and responsible disposal of balloons.

Balloons have been part of our growing up since the early 19th Century and are a much loved

consumer product for the young and old. A 2014 survey³ concluded that 77% of European consumers strongly agreed that balloons bring pleasure to people of all ages and that a similar number strongly disagreed with a ban on balloons. The balloon industry is well organized employing thousands of people around the world and is fully aware of its responsibilities to consumers and the environment.

It is unrealistic to suggest that we should ban balloons that are in any event a very small part of a much wider litter problem. Instead the EBPC continues to work with the industry to improve standards for the protection and preservation of the environment, and would welcome input from environmental agencies and action groups to further its consumer education campaigns.

¹ Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, May 2013, *Sky lanterns and helium balloons: an assessment of impacts on livestock and the environment*, Welsh Government

² European Balloon & Party Council, EBPC Code of Best Practice, www.ebpcouncil.eu.

³ Ernst & Young, May 2014, *The Contribution & Role of Balloons in Europe*, Regioplan Policy Research, Amsterdam

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About European Balloon & Party Council (EBPC)

The EBPC is made up of over 30 key players from the balloon and party industry. The association is working hard to represent its members on key issues that arise within the EU, whilst providing its members with communication on new directives and legislation.

Further information about EBPC can be found at
<http://www.ebpcouncil.eu>