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RE: BAN THE RELEASE OF HELIUM BALLOONS IN THE STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

Dear Mayor and Esteemed Town Commissioners,

As an extremely active volunteer for many organizations on the Outer Banks I can bear witness to the horrors that all litter, and more specifically, balloon pollution, creates on Our beautiful shoreline and in Our oceans. As a member of N.E.S.T. and a member of The Mammal and Seal Stranding Teams, I see firsthand examples of how balloons cause injury and death to these magnificent creatures, some who have sadly obtained Government Status as ENDANGERED. With your help, I hope to acquire local resolutions prohibiting the release of ALL helium/nitrous balloons while also implementing other restrictions for safer sales and post purchasing practices. My goal is to obtain Legislation throughout the State of North Carolina, and further use it to entice other States throughout Our Country to do the same. The Releasing of Balloons is not strictly a coastal issue. It harms wildlife AND domestic animals throughout the whole United States. Balloon Pollution is a Global problem; one we can address here, at home, and make a grand statement that it is not only not accepted here but will no longer be tolerated in our Beautiful Outer Banks and its surrounding areas.

The Latex balloon is made from plant-based materials and is marketed as biodegradable. There are, in fact, chemicals added to the process which allows the balloon to exist longer. These take approximately 4 to 5 years to break down. The Mylar balloon is created from Nylon and a thin layer of metalized film on top, which is made from petroleum. This type of balloon can take, according to scientific research, upwards of 100 years to break down. The ribbon takes about 150 years. THEY NEVER, NEVER COMPLETELY GO AWAY as they break down into microplastics, causing damage to sea life of all sizes.

Sea inhabitants become ensnared in ribbon, as do Our magnificent shorebirds. Balloon plastic is the number one threat to a shorebird's existence and is 32% higher than the threat of hard plastics. Sea Turtles mistake balloons for jellyfish, a staple in their diet. Larger mammals ingest these balloons. They become lodged in the digestive tract giving the animal a sense of having eaten recently. This causes the animal to stop feeding and it will die a horrific and agonizing death of starvation. In November 2023, a Gervais Beaked Whale was found deceased on Emerald Isle, NC. It was determined that the cause of death was in fact an ingested balloon which was found to be intact at the necropsy. This was a nursing calf, still at his mother's side. At the site of the December 27, 2023 stranding of a Sperm Whale in Nags Head I found a balloon not far from the water that had a company logo on it. When I traced the company to its location, I found that it had traveled 760 miles from a realtor office in Birmingham, Alabama. While it had not made it to the ocean it certainly could have caused harm to another animal as BALLOONS ARE THE NUMBER 1 CAUSE OF DEATH FOR SPERM WHALES.

The average helium balloon is able to travel approximately 1300 miles. The Cape Hatteras National Seashore National Park Service recently reported that they collected 1786 balloons in 2023. The number collected in 2022 was 733; an increase of more than 1000 balloons. One of the balloons collected this year had been released 3 days prior to its being found and was released from Wisconsin. I remind people to liken a balloon traveling through the wind currents across our Country as did the smoke from the Canadian wildfires in the Summer of 2023. Balloons can blow! I also like to remind listeners that while the number of retrieved balloons is impressive, consider firstly that this is over a span of approximately 70 miles of our 3375 mile coastline and secondly, imagine if you can, how many thousands more balloons did not land on our coast, but came to rest in our beautiful ocean. The numbers must be staggering.

Balloon releases can be both ACCIDENTAL and PURPOSEFUL. An accidental release occurs when attempting to load your car in a windy environment, or breaking free from a sign or mailbox, for example. A purposeful release occurs for Weddings, Graduations, Gender Reveals and most popular, Memorializing a loved one. Alternatives exist in many forms. One can choose brightly colored pinwheels for signage or mailboxes. One can scatter birdseed or wildflower seeds, use all natural confetti, plant a tree, or my favorite, blow bubbles. I promise you; **BALLOONS DO NOT MAKE IT TO HEAVEN!** The use of balloons can and should be replaced with items that are more respectful to the world we live in and all its inhabitants. As a frequent roadside and beach trash collector, the number of balloons retrieved is heartbreaking, but I promise you I've never had cause to pick up seeds or bubbles.

If you are driving down the road and throw a deflated balloon out of your car window, it is called littering. If you fill a balloon with helium and let it go into the air, do you know what that is called? It is **STILL** littering!

I ask that you consider implementing covenants, resolutions or bylaws for the following:

1. All Helium/Nitrous filled balloons sold in your town jurisdiction be required to have a one ounce or more weighted object attached to their tether at the time of sale.
2. No balloons may be used as attachments to unsupervised and unmonitored outdoor signage, mailboxes, railings, tables, etc. where accidental releasing may occur.
3. No companies may advertise or offer for sale, at any time, balloons whose sole intention is that for releasing, i.e., memorial, wedding, graduation, etc.,
4. **NO BALLOONS, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF GOVERNMENTAL PERMISSION, MAY BE RELEASED AT ANY TIME, FOR ANY PURPOSE, IN ANY AMOUNT.**

We are all so fortunate to reside where we do. What a great and resounding testament to our residents and visitors alike that we, together are taking a stand to exclaim that our Coast and its inhabitants matter to us, today, and for all time to come.

Respectfully submitted,

Debbie Swick