

Balloon releases are spectacular and are able to fulfil a variety of promotional and fundraising objectives.

There are basically two types of balloons available: foil balloons (a nylon bladder covered with a thin layer of aluminium); and latex balloons made from the sap of rubber trees.

Concerns have been expressed in the past about the impact balloons have upon the environment both as a cause of litter; and as a possible cause of injury to wildlife and animals that swallow partly inflated balloons.

NABAS, the independent trade association for the party and promotional balloon industry in the UK, has provided information that a scientific survey carried out in 1989 revealed that on release a balloon will float up to a height of approximately 5 miles, becomes brittle, and then shatters into miniscule pieces falling back to earth at a rate of about one piece every 5 square miles. Problems can arise when a balloon is not inflated properly or fully or is carrying too much weight and therefore does not reach the height at which shattering occurs. NABAS has produced the following code of conduct and guidelines aimed at minimising possible damage to the environment:-

Guide to Balloon Releases

Only a small balloon release (up to 1000 balloons) should be attempted without professional assistance.

Releasing more than 5,000 balloons requires a written application for permission to the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), at least 28 days in advance, of the release because balloons can interfere with air traffic. (A form can be obtained by calling either the NABAS office on 01989 762 204 or the Airspace Utilisation Section of the CAA on 020 7453 6599).

Code of Conduct (NABAS)

1. Only natural latex rubber balloons will be used for Releases

Latex, being an organic product degrades naturally in the environment at about the same rate as an oak leaf (6 months).. Balloons made of any material other than latex and in particular foil balloons should not be used for Releases.

2. All components used in balloon releases must be biodegradable

Balloons must be hand tied, plastic valves should not be used. Any attached labels must be of paper, preferably recycled.

3. Only helium gas should be used to inflate the balloons

Helium is an inert lighter-than-air gas. As the balloon rises, the gas expands until eventually the balloon bursts producing small fragments, which aid decomposition.

4. No ribbons or strings must be attached to the balloons

Ribbons and strings represent a potential problem and must never be used in balloon releases. Labels should be attached via the hand tied balloon knot.

5. Balloons must always be launched singly

Single balloons disperse easily and quickly. They must never be tied together in bunches for balloon releases.

6. Full approval must be obtained from the relevant authorities

Releases exceeding 5000 balloons should not take place unless they have been cleared in advance with all relevant air traffic and local authorities. The Authorities must be notified in writing at least 28 days prior to the release.

7. Maximum balloon size

Balloons larger than 300mm cannot be released. It is forbidden to use balloons containing any metallic pigment.

8. All balloons sold near balloon releases must be weighted

Any balloons sold in the vicinity of a balloon release must be sold with a weight attached to ensure they cannot escape. Foil Balloons must never be released. Latex balloons with a plastic valve and ribbon must also be weighted.