

Should Balloons Be Banned?

Two writers face off in a debate.

YES

Parties Can Be Fun Without Balloons By Natalie Romero

Emily cannot wait for her birthday party. She is turning 10—double digits! The cake will be chocolate. The tunes will be from the musical *Hamilton*. There will even be a magician. But there is one thing that Emily refuses to have at her party: balloons.

What could anyone have against such an innocent and delightful party decoration?

Turns out, balloons have a dark side.

The first floating balloons were filled with hydrogen gas. The problem with hydrogen is that it catches fire easily.

Nobody enjoys balloons exploding on their party guests, so instead people began filling balloons with helium gas, which isn't flammable.

But helium has many uses that are far more important than making balloons float. It is used for medical equipment and in scientific experiments. It even helps send rockets into space. Helium is also a rare **natural resource**; the known supply of it on Earth is limited. Some scientists are concerned that we are **depleting** the world's helium supply too quickly. So even though only a small percentage of that supply is used to fill balloons, to many experts—and to Emily—it seems silly to waste such a valuable resource on something as **frivolous** as birthday balloons.

Wasting helium isn't the only problem with balloons either. It's a tradition to let them go and watch as they disappear into the clouds. When those balloons come back down, they can harm wildlife. Birds get tangled in the strings. Many animals mistake them for food. (Dead whales and sea turtles have been found with pieces of balloon in their stomachs.) Balloons also contribute to the litter problem on our beaches. It's no wonder several states have outlawed balloon releases.

So kudos to Emily for choosing to go balloon-free on her birthday. When her friends found out, they were disappointed, but after Emily explained her reasoning, they understood. Of course, a little chocolate cake tends to make most people more understanding.

Now it's time for all of us to follow Emily's example and banish balloons from our lives forever.



NO

Balloons Bring Joy to Millions By Theo Lewis

Can you imagine a world in which balloons have vanished? No balloons on your birthday. No balloon bouquets to cheer you up when you're sick. No balloons floating down the street at parades.

What a sad, dull world that would be!

But some people are saying it's time for balloons to go the way of the dinosaurs. They say balloons are bad for the environment and dangerous to animals. They are wrong.

"There is little evidence to support claims of the danger that balloons pose to marine animals," says Dan Flynn, chairman of the Balloon Council, an organization of balloon makers and sellers. According to Flynn, the real problem is plastic trash—things like bags and bottles.

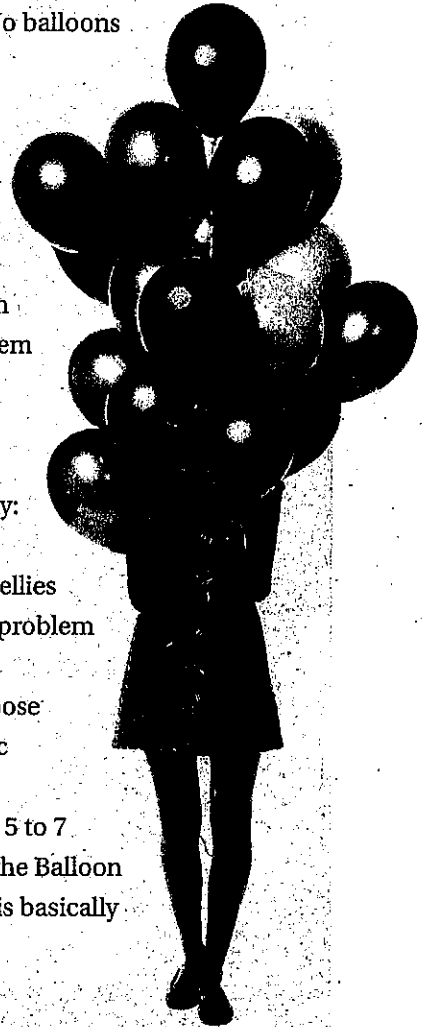
Still, even if balloons do pose some minor threat to wildlife, the solution isn't to ban all balloons forever. That would be an extreme overreaction. The solution is simply to stop releasing them. Instead, **dispose** of balloons properly. Deflate them and cut any ribbons or strings into small pieces before throwing the balloons away. Balloons placed in the trash are unlikely to end up in the bellies of marine creatures or as litter on beaches. Proper disposal will also solve the problem of balloons getting caught in power lines and causing outages.

Another way to ensure your balloons don't harm the environment is to choose ones made of latex rather than Mylar. Latex is **biodegradable**. Mylar—a plastic material that looks like foil—is not.

Then there is the so-called problem of helium. Yes, helium is rare. But only 5 to 7 percent of the world's helium supply is used to inflate balloons, according to the Balloon Association, a British trade organization. This amount of helium is so small it is basically **negligible**.

The Balloon Council has been working with **consumers** and **retailers** to make sure everyone knows how to use and dispose of balloons responsibly.

"Balloons bring people so much joy," says Flynn. "There aren't a lot of dangers. When they are properly handled, they are very safe."



SCAVENGER HUNT

Directions: Hunt through each essay for the following elements.

1. Underline the **central idea**, or **central claim**.
2. Put a star next to two pieces of **supporting evidence**.
3. Circle the **counterargument**.
4. Put a double star next to the **writer's rebuttal**.

YOU decide: Who made the stronger argument?