

Sands Policy Statement on Balloon and Sky Lantern Releases

July 2018

1. Introduction

Sands Volunteers and supporters have for many years used balloon releases as a way of raising awareness and remembering their babies who have died, and we recognise that these events hold great impact and significance for bereaved families. Over recent months and years the environmental damage done by balloons to wildlife and oceans has become recognised, and opinion on releases both from Sands' members and the general public has changed. The reputational risk to regional groups as well as Sands nationally is increasing, alongside the significant damage caused to the environment by such events.

Sands seeks to support bereaved parents to remember their babies in ways which are both personally significant and which have an impact on raising awareness of the issues around baby loss, but without compromising the environment or distracting from Sands vital work around baby loss.

2. Position

It is now widely known that balloon and sky lantern releases have the potential to impact adversely upon the environment. Sands takes its responsibility to protect the environment very seriously.

Sands believes:

1. There is a risk of harm or death to wildlife and livestock (ingestion, entanglement, entrapment, panic) from released balloons and sky lanterns.
2. Unexpired sky lanterns pose a significant and very real fire hazard.
3. Both contribute to the defacement of land by litter and waste.
4. Helium supplies are finite and scarce – and are needed for machines such as MRI scanners.

Sands will therefore not encourage the use of balloons or sky lanterns for releases and will work actively with supporters and volunteers to find environmentally friendly alternatives.

3. Views from other organisations

Many councils and local authorities are voting to ban balloon and lantern releases.

The Chief Fire Officers Association, National Farmers Union, Women's Farmers Union, Marine Conservation Society, Country Land Owners Association, Newmarket Stud Farmers Association and RSPCA are amongst those urging individuals to use alternatives to balloons and sky lanterns and to ask event planners and retailers to use alternatives as well. Fire and Rescue Groups, Master Thatchers and Wildlife Trusts have also noted their concerns or called for a ban.

There is more information on the impact on wildlife available [here](#) and issues around Helium [here](#)

4. Butterfly releases

Sands does not support the release of butterflies for remembrance events due to the following wildlife concerns:

- Butterfly releases disturb the natural distribution of species and the study thereof.
- Bred butterflies may have different genetic traits from wild ones and releases may disrupt the genetics of natural populations.
- There is a risk of spreading diseases to a wild populations already at risk.
- Releases send the wrong message regarding human attitudes towards nature and detracts from the real issues facing butterfly populations.

5. Dove releases

There is concern from the RSPCA and other animal welfare charities about the use of doves in releases for events and again in terms of animal welfare and environmental issues Sands is unable to support dove releases.

6. Bio-degradable balloons

Biodegradable balloons are damaging to the environment as they take 4-5 years to degrade and have the same potential impact on wildlife. While much of the balloon might disintegrate over time, the knot and some of the latex remains long after you said your goodbyes, while their strings entangle wildlife.

Sands will therefore not encourage the use of bio-degradable balloons for releases.

7. Alternative Remembrance Events

We have collected together many very special alternatives to balloon releases which Sands volunteers and supporters across the country have suggested/used. These include:

- Blow bubbles into the breeze: for an eco-friendly way to remember.
- Foam shape machines can blow foam butterflies or other shapes skyward.
- Flower/petal drops into rivers – flower heads are dropped and floated downstream – a powerful way to let go by watching petals float away.
- Create a line of pebbles marked with babies names.
- Bulb planting – this can be done in conjunction with local authority parks departments to provide an increasing display year on year in a town or country park.
- Plant a tree: it will last many lifetimes and will support more life.
- Throw wild flower bombs: again they create more life, and a riot of colour for years to come.
- Rice paper boats can be named and sailed down river.

- Coloured strings of lights.
- Write your best memories in chalk: they will stay for a little while then will be washed away, without causing harm but you can take a photo of them to hold forever.
- Write names in the sand.
- Have a ribbon event.

This is a [blog written by a bereaved Dad](#) about balloon releases and beautiful alternatives.

Get in touch with Sands Fundraising team to discuss the suggestions further or to share your own ideas.