

US beach town bans balloons to save the ocean

Level 1: Elementary

1 Warmer

- a. Do you use balloons to decorate for holidays or celebrations? Look at the list in the first column. Tick (✓) if you use balloons to decorate for that occasion. Compare answers with a partner.

Holiday or special occasion	Me	My Partner
birthdays		
Christmas		
Easter		
Halloween		
weddings		

- b. What are other occasions when you can decorate with balloons? Discuss as a class.

2 Key words

- a. Write the correct words from the wordpool to complete the definitions below. Then find and highlight them in the article to read them in context.

ban

break down

pay

plastic

soft

1. to not allow something by law _____
2. a common artificial substance used to create many things _____
3. to give money to buy something _____
4. not hard _____
5. to divide something into parts _____

hard

neck

stomach

careful

on purpose

6. difficult to bend or break _____
7. the part of the body that joins the head to the rest of the body _____
8. the part of the body where food goes when you eat it _____
9. paying attention to what you are doing so you don't have problems _____
10. not by accident; planned _____

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b. Use some of the key words above to complete these sentences.

1. Many people want to use less _____, but it is everywhere!
2. Why does your _____ hurt? What did you eat today?
3. This pillow is so _____. It feels like a cloud.
4. On the playground, you will hear parents say, "Be _____!" a lot.
5. Can I _____ with a credit card?
6. Did they forget this bag, or did they leave it here _____?

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- 1 Laguna Beach, California, stopped the sale and use of balloons. They said the reasons are fires and rubbish in the sea. Beginning in 2024, no balloons will be allowed in public places or city events. People may have to pay up to 500 dollars if they use them.
- 2 There are more and more bans like this. Maryland and Virginia's started in 2021. Hawaii did the same in 2022, and New York and Florida may be next. Like plastic bags, experts say balloon bans could become more popular as people understand how they hurt the oceans.
- 3 Cities on the water see and feel the environmental effects and pay for it. Anja Brandon, Associate Director at the environmental group Ocean Conservancy, says, "Many of these cities use taxpayers' money to pay for beach clean-ups."
- 4 Sea animals and sea turtles can eat the soft balloon plastic. It is 32 times more likely to kill seabirds than hard plastic.
- 5 Companies say that some balloons aren't harmful, but there are no safe balloons, says Lara O'Brien, with NOAA's Office for Coastal Management. They can take 20 years, or more, to break down.
- 6 Everything takes longer in the water, says Kara Wiggin, a researcher at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography. A lot of stuff that can break down in soil can't break down in the ocean at all.
- 7 Balloon strings can go around animals' necks and body parts, and researchers find them inside bird stomachs. This can kill animals, such as the Guadalupe fur seal and Hawaiian monk seal.
- 8 Wiggin says there are fewer balloons than plastic bags on the beaches, but they can cause damage, and people need to be more careful with them. Wiggins says that people let balloons fly away on purpose, but they don't do that with plastic bags.
- 9 There's no good way to get rid of them. That's why banning them works so well, according to Wiggin, who says she likes paper decorations instead.
- 10 "Plastic pollution anywhere affects the ocean everywhere," says Brandon. "We only have one water cycle."

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3 Comprehension check

a. Are these statements True (T) or False (F) according to the article? Correct any that are false.

1. A city in Florida recently stopped the sale and use of balloons.
2. No balloons are allowed in your house or flat.
3. Balloons are 32 times more likely to kill seabirds than hard plastic.
4. Some balloons are safe.
5. Balloon strings can also hurt birds and sea animals.
6. There are more balloons than plastic bags on beaches now.
7. The article suggests using paper decorations.
8. Plastic pollution in one part of the ocean only hurts *that* part of the ocean.

4 Key language

a. Match the antonyms.

- | | |
|---------------|----------------|
| 1. soft | a. save |
| 2. kill | b. less |
| 3. long | c. by accident |
| 4. more | d. hard |
| 5. safe | e. allow |
| 6. on purpose | f. short |
| 7. ban | g. harmful |

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b. Now complete the sentences using some of the words above.

1. How can we _____ more sea animals? We shouldn't _____ them.
2. Coral can be _____ or _____, depending what kind it is.
3. I'll help you look for your sister. Does she have _____ or _____ hair?
4. I like _____ milk in my coffee, but my husband prefers _____.

c. Write four sentences of your own using words from the previous task.

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- "Balloons don't hurt the oceans much because we don't use them every day."
- "We should not use plastic anymore."
- "We should spend more money on cleaning the oceans."

6 In your own words

- a. Imagine you are studying the ways plastic hurts animals in the ocean. What do you already know? Fill in the 'What I know' column of the chart.
- b. What questions do you have? Write your questions in the 'What I want to know' column.
- c. Use an internet search engine to find answers to your questions and more information about the topic. Use the data to fill in the 'What I learned' column. Present your notes to your class.

What I know	What I want to know	What I learned