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The Effects of Releasing Balloons: Soft Plastic Pollution in our Oceans

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The Effects of Releasing Balloons: Soft Plastic Pollution In Our Oceans

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Overview:
Beach surveys indicate that the amount of balloon litter on our beaches has tripled in the last 10 years (Balloons Blow Inc, 2019). Beach and ocean litter in the form of plastics, termed marine debris, is often mistaken by marine wildlife as their natural food source (Mendenhall, 2019). Sea turtles, whales, dolphins, and thousands of species of seabirds ingest plastics every day with fatal consequences. Even when not ingested, wildlife can perish as a result of balloon litter. Organisms can become entangled in strings attached to balloons and can perish as a result of immobility caused by the strings, or if caught around the neck, wildlife often dies by asphyxiation (Vonderlin, 2019).

Introduction:
This study was conducted in order to gain a better understanding of the effects of plastic pollution in the ocean. It was hypothesized that wildlife coming into contact with both soft and hard plastics would experience detrimental effects in order to spread awareness of this issue and create action against these effects in order to gain better understanding of these negative effects in order to spread awareness of this issue to the general public and create action against the need for release of plastics into the environment.

Case Study- Sea Turtles:
An endangered, juvenile, green sea turtle found washed up onshore in Argentina recently made news headlines. In its necropsy, scientists were shocked to find the young sea turtle had swallowed four types of balloons, two tar balls, a large piece of synthetic plastic carpet-like material, and many other types of hard plastic. This is thought to have caused its premature death. News sources report that these sea turtles mistake plastics floating in the open oceans for their favorite food, jellyfish. Such plastic has also been found in the area on the backs of crabs who mistake it for shells, in the stomachs of dead whales, albatrosses, and other species of sea turtles.

Safer Alternatives to Releasing Balloons:
There are many alternatives to releasing balloons at parties such as making a commemorative stepping stone, sponsoring a bench, planting native trees, lighting colored lanterns, writing in stepping stone, or making a commemorative football game. This is thought to have caused its premature death. But that celebratory act is detrimental to the lives of so many animals, specifically whales, birds, and sea turtles.

Our art piece is intended to showcase how balloons are killing these animals. We wanted to use recycled balloons in our piece for a few purposes. First, for their aesthetic purposes- balloons are typically beautiful in vibrant colors and three dimensional, which gives our piece some depth and catches the audience’s attention. Second, by using recycled material, we can not only clean up the environment, but also show our audiences the impact balloons have on animals.

The whale, bird, and sea turtle in the piece are made out of mud stencils. We did this in a way to tie our piece back to the Earth. Our intention is to counter the vibrant balloons with the one dimensional, single colored animals. Animals are natural, thus we chose to make them out of natural resources.

Methods & Materials:
- Secondary research was conducted in order to obtain information on wildlife mortality caused by contact with marine debris in the form of soft and hard plastics
- Acrylic paint, matte board, balloon debris, plastic grocery bags, mylar mud stencils, potting soil, brushes, and clear adhesive mod podge spray were used to create this work

Literature Cited:
Balloons Blow Inc. “Impacts on Wildlife & the Environment.”


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