



Virginia Coastal Zone MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program
Semi-Annual Success Story to NOAA ("Section C")
April – October 2018

Reducing Balloon Debris with Community-Based Social Marketing

THE PROBLEM:

Balloon litter is of immediate concern to the Atlantic Coast because of its potentially severe impact on marine life. Experts ranked released balloons among the top five most deadly forms of marine debris due to the likelihood of balloon litter entanglement or ingestion by seabirds, sea turtles and marine mammals.

In August 2018, Clean Virginia Waterways of Longwood University published a **balloon debris monitoring report** funded by Virginia CZM, *Balloon Litter on Virginia's Remote Beaches*, documenting balloons as the most abundant type of waste on five beaches surveyed between 2013 and 2017. Researchers found more than 11,441 balloons and balloon-related pieces of litter (e.g., plastic valves, disks, plastic ribbons). Balloons and their attachments made up 40 percent of all debris recorded, followed by plastic bottles and fishing gear. The amount of balloon litter varied from 25 items per mile on Cedar Island in Accomack County to more than 272 items per mile on Fisherman Island National Wildlife Refuge in Northampton County.

All released balloons become litter, yet many people planning balloon release events to celebrate and memorialize life events do not think about it as littering or consider the many impacts to marine habitat and wildlife.

THE FIX:

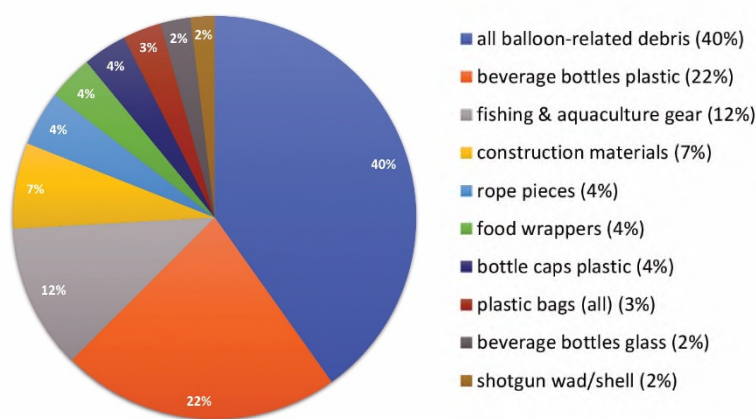
One of the near term actions identified in the **Virginia Marine Debris Reduction Plan** was design and implementation of a social marketing campaign targeting behaviors that will reduce balloon litter in the marine environment.

Between 2015-2017, Virginia CZM and its partners conducted **comprehensive research on the behavior of releasing balloons**, with grants from NOAA's Office for Coastal Management and Marine Debris Program, to better understand who plans balloon release events – and, most importantly – why balloons are selected to celebrate and memorialize in lieu of other actions. Conducting this research was the first and most important step in developing a **Community-Based Social Marketing (CBSM) campaign** to change behavior and reduce balloon releases.



These are some of 176 littered balloons that were recorded and removed from the shoreline of Cedar Island on October 31, 2014 during a survey. Cedar Island is an uninhabited barrier island on Virginia's Eastern Shore. Photo by Christina Trapani.

Top Ten Marine Debris Items on Virginia's Remote Beaches



Virginia CZM and its partners, working with the marketing research firm OpinionWorks, identified key themes regarding balloon releases, including:

- many people do not understand that no balloon is environmentally friendly if released, and that every released balloon becomes litter and can be harmful;
- some people who are aware that balloons often become litter and that balloons have a harmful impact, justify or rationalize their actions; and,
- many people assume “biodegradable” means “harmless.”

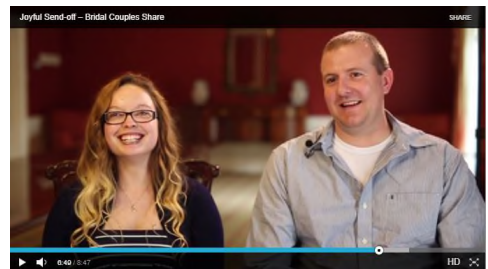
After reviewing the research findings, partners agreed to focus first on reducing balloon releases at celebratory versus memorial events (feeling that when people are grieving is not an appropriate time to approach them about their decisions on how to commemorate their loss). Additional message testing with engaged and married couples informed the design of the *Joyful Send-off* campaign – launched in August 2017 – to reduce balloon releases at weddings and, by extension, other celebratory or memorial events in which these couples may engage in the future.

The *Joyful Send-off* campaign message is that litter-free send-offs are memorable, joyful, and picture-perfect. The campaign strategy includes colorful, vivid, and captivating imagery and multi-media, including videos with couples sharing their personal experiences. This CBSM approach engages venues, planners, and other wedding businesses, who influence the decisions of couples, and share behavioral prompts with couples. (www.joyfulsendoff.org)

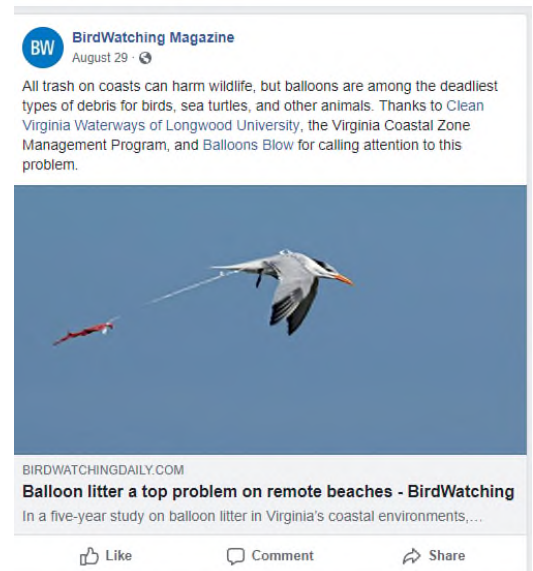
THE IMPACT:

Virginia's balloon debris monitoring and balloon release studies represent the most extensive long-term research project focused on balloon-related litter and its impacts. The Joyful Send-off campaign is the first application of CBSM to change a behavior that reduces this form of marine litter. The initial research results were so compelling that the Mid-Atlantic Regional Planning Body agreed to pursue expansion of the Virginia campaign to the entire Mid-Atlantic.

The studies and the campaign received **a great deal of media attention, and the reach of these articles through social media is growing.** For example, BirdWatching Magazine staff reported that an article in their on-line publication “...seems to have struck a chord with our audience.” The magazine’s Facebook posts to share the article generated numbers “...much higher than anything we’ve posted in recent memory.” Media attention also inspired the creation of an additional video about balloon litter impacts by ATTN: Media, which has garnered over 2 million views. Although the footage was not used, *CBS This Morning* interviewed the Virginia CZM Program Manager for a piece on the issue of balloon releases, which did air. *Chesapeake* magazine also participated in a balloon monitoring visit with CZM Program staff and grantees to Fisherman Island in preparation for their soon-to-be published article on the project.



Multi-media components of the campaign strategy include a kit distributed to venues to help convey the message to couples (above); and videos highlighting alternatives to release and a series of interviews with couples about the choice they made not to release.



Royal Tern with Baggage. Photo by Fran Baer.

The launch and implementation of the campaign in Virginia fulfills the near-term action identified in the **Virginia Marine Debris Reduction Plan** (*more details on development of the plan are available in the Oct 2014 – March 31 2015 Section C*). **Mid-Atlantic expansion of the campaign** will fulfill one of the strategies of the Mid-Atlantic Ocean Action Plan. The former Mid-Atlantic Regional Planning Body, and Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean (MARCO), agreed that the best course for a regional marine debris strategy is to expand the *Joyful Send-off* campaign. MARCO submitted a successful FY18 proposal to the NOAA Marine Debris Program to fund this expansion.

Prior to expansion, MARCO's Mid-Atlantic Marine Debris Work Group is receiving **Master Coaching from Dr. Doug McKenzie-Mohr, the founder of Community-Based Social Marketing**, to help guide this process. Virginia CZ is funding this coaching. Dr. McKenzie-Mohr was complimentary of the work on the Virginia pilot of the *Joyful-Send-off* CBSM campaign, indicating he was "very pleased with how you have applied community-based social marketing to this project," and that he would like to add the campaign as a case study in his workshops and to his website. The Work Group is currently working with OpinionWorks to conduct additional research and testing to identify any necessary changes to the *Joyful Send-off* strategy to ensure that the campaign will be effective in reducing balloon releases and debris in the Mid-Atlantic region. The Work Group plans to implement a campaign they hope will be scalable beyond the target communities and transferable to other regions of the United States.

Since balloons can travel great distances, measuring success presents challenges. Mid-Atlantic states will measure current balloon litter on beaches and monitor this litter during the implementation of the regional campaign (until 2021), using a **Balloon Debris Monitoring Protocol developed by Virginia**.

Virginia CZM and Clean Virginia Waterways also recently established a **new website hub for balloon litter** – www.PreventBalloonLitter.org. They also wrote and produced **two new videos** – an animation and testimonial interviews with experts – focused on communicating the impacts of balloon releases. The website highlights the campaigns, projects and resources available to reduce this form of marine debris. The intent is that the website will not be limited to Virginia efforts, but available to all Mid-Atlantic and MARCO states and partners, as well as national and even international partners.



An animation video and a video of interviews with marine debris experts titled *Balloon Litter: A Conversation* – are downloadable from www.PreventBalloonLitter.org and from YouTube at www.youtube.com/channel/UC79VQJ1IkeGbKJDT-6owRyw

Another important goal of Virginia CZM's marine debris reduction efforts has been to **build the capacity of our partners to use social marketing** to target common, persistent and harmful debris items such as single-use plastic, derelict fishing gear, crab pots, micro-plastics and cigarette butts. In June 2017, Virginia CZM provided training for Virginia and Mid-Atlantic partners with Dr. McKenzie-Mohr. In July 2018, New Jersey followed suit and held a training workshop with Doug to ensure more Mid-Atlantic partners received training in CBSM.

MORE INFORMATION:

Reports:

- *Balloon Litter on Virginia's Remote Beaches* - submitted to the NOAA Office of Coastal Management in August 2018
- *Balloon Release Research in Virginia & Reducing Balloon Debris through Community-Based Social Marketing* – submitted to the NOAA Marine Debris Program in November 2017

Fact Sheets:

- *Reducing Balloon Marine Debris: Taking the Rise Out of Balloon Debris in Virginia through Social Marketing*
- *Balloon Debris: A Rising Concern in the Mid-Atlantic*

All publications are downloadable at

www.deq.virginia.gov/Programs/CoastalZoneManagement/CZMIssuesInitiatives/MarineDebris/MarineDebris-Balloons.aspx

PARTNERS: Staff support for the research, campaign design, and implementation of the *Joyful Send-off* campaign pilot in Virginia was provided in large part by the Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program and Clean Virginia Waterways of Longwood University through grants from the NOAA Office for Coastal Management and Marine Debris Program. Partners who provided extensive in-kind support, include: OpinionWorks; partners who served on the Balloon Campaign Advisory Team; Virginia Aquarium; and, those who provided services (such as photo and video shoot models, locations and props). Mid-Atlantic expansion of the *Joyful Send-off* campaign is being funded with grants from the NOAA Marine Debris Program to MARCO and the Office for Coastal Management, with matching support from numerous partners in the Mid-Atlantic States – Virginia, Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey and New York.

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CZM FUNDS EXPENDED & OTHER FUNDS LEVERAGED –

Virginia CZM Program Grants (Deliverables include balloon monitoring and CBSM research, design and implementation. Table does not include value of time spent by CZM Program Manager on these efforts.)			
Grant Year/Task	Amount	Grantee	Project
FY 13 Task 81	\$45,000	Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center Foundation	Monitoring Marine Debris in Virginia's Coastal Zone
FY 14 Task 95.03	\$65,000	Longwood University – Clean Virginia Waterways	Virginia Marine Debris Reduction Plan Refinement and Implementation of Balloon Reduction Social Marketing Campaign
FY 15 Task 95.03	\$65,993	Longwood University – Clean Virginia Waterways	VA Marine Debris Reduction Plan Refinement & Implementation of Balloon Reduction Social Marketing Campaign
FY 16 Task 94.03	\$60,000	Longwood University – Clean Virginia Waterways	VA Marine Debris Reduction Plan Refinement & Implementation of Balloon Reduction Social Marketing Campaign
FY 17 Task 94.03	\$60,000	Longwood University – Clean Virginia Waterways	VA Marine Debris Reduction Plan Refinement
FY 14 Task 1.03	\$31,171	Virginia CZM Program – Virginia Dept of Environmental Quality	Virginia CZM Program Outreach & Social Marketing (Staff time for MD grant proposal writing and pre-campaign research)
FY 15 Task 1.02	\$30,135	Virginia CZM Program – Virginia Dept of Environmental Quality	Virginia CZM Program Outreach & Social Marketing (Staff time for continued research)
FY 16 Task 1.02	\$31,171	Virginia CZM Program – Virginia Dept of Environmental Quality	Virginia CZM Program Outreach & Social Marketing (staff time for campaign design and implementation)
FY 17 Task 1.02	\$31,408	Virginia CZM Program – Virginia Dept of Environmental Quality	Virginia CZM Program Outreach & Social Marketing (staff time for continued campaign implementation and MD grant proposal writing)
TOTAL	\$419,878		

Leveraged Funds

NOAA MDP FY 14	\$50,000	Virginia DEQ - Virginia CZM Program (partnering with Clean Virginia Waterways, Longwood University)	A Rising Concern: Reducing Balloon Release and Debris through a Social Marketing Campaign
NOAA MDP 14 Match Funds	\$50,000	Virginia DEQ - Virginia CZM Program (partnering with Clean Virginia Waterways, Longwood University)	A Rising Concern: Reducing Balloon Release and Debris through a Social Marketing Campaign
NOAA MDP FY18	\$145,607	Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean (MARCO)	Expanding a Joyful Send-off: Regional Prevention of Balloon Marine Debris
NOAA MDP 14 Match Funds	\$180,353.60	Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean (MARCO)	Expanding a Joyful Send-off: Regional Prevention
TOTAL		\$425,961	

MEDIA COVERAGE

Media name	date run	Name of article or segment	URL
NPR All Things Considered	8-19-18		
The Associated Press	8-15-18	<i>A rising concern? After straws, balloons get more scrutiny</i>	www.myaic.com/business/rising-concern-after-straws-balloons-get-more-scrutiny/nr1QNxipat6KydNLGTpVJP/
Ynet, Israel's top news website	7-29-18		
Zavit -Israel's science and environment news agency	7-29-18		www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-5318982,00.html
CBS This Morning	in press		www.zavit.org.il/%D7%96%D7%94-%D7%A1%D7%95%D7%A4%D7%95-%D7%A9%D7%9C-%D7%9B%D7%9C-%D7%91%D7%9C%D7%95%D7%9F/
Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in Toronto	in press		
USA Today	8-22-18	<i>Is the party over for balloons? Impact on environment raises possibility of a ban</i>	www.usatoday.com/story/news/2018/08/22/balloon-bans-after-straw-bans-balloons-going-next/1055356002/
EcoWatch	8-15-18	<i>After Plastic Straws, Are Balloons Next to Go?</i>	
Earther / Gizmodo.com	8-24-18	<i>Balloons Are Bad. Should We Ban Them?</i>	https://earther.gizmodo.com/balloons-are-bad-should-we-ban-them-1828529727

?	8-24-18		<u>Seperti Plastik, Balon Juga Jadi 'Musuh' buat Lingkung, VIVA, Jumat, 24 Agustus 2018 - https://www.viva.co.id/digital/digilife/1067923-seperti-plastik-balon-juga-jadi-musuh-buat-lingkungan</u>
BirdWatchingToday.com, social pages and e-newsletter	8-29-18	<i>Balloon litter a top problem on remote beaches</i>	www.birdwatchingdaily.com/blog/2018/08/29/balloon-litter-problem-remote-beaches/
Pittsburg Post-Gazette	<u>8-15-18</u>	<i>A rising concern? After straws, balloons get more scrutiny</i>	www.post-gazette.com/news/environment/2018/08/15/plastic-straws-balloons-ban-environment/stories/201808150100
Business Insider	<u>8-15-18</u>	<i>A rising concern? After straws, balloons get more scrutiny</i>	www.businessinsider.com/ap-a-rising-concern-after-straws-balloons-get-more-scrutiny-2018-8
The Pueblo Chieftain	<u>8-15-18</u>	<i>A rising concern? After straws, balloons get more scrutiny</i>	www.chieftain.com/life/a-rising-concern-after-straws-balloons-get-more-scrutiny/article_861ad9b7-c749-50fb-a951-141f88d8633d.html
23WIFR	<u>8-15-18</u>	<i>A rising concern? After straws, balloons get more scrutiny</i>	www.wifr.com/content/news/?article=490923911
Water Education Foundation	<u>8-15-18</u>	<i>A rising concern? After straws, balloons get more scrutiny</i>	www.watereducation.org/aquaforia-news/rising-concern-after-straws-balloons-get-more-scrutiny
Times Standard	<u>8-29-18</u>	<i>A rising concern? After straws, balloons get more scrutiny</i>	www.times-standard.com/2018/08/15/a-rising-concern-after-straws-balloons-get-more-scrutiny/
VOA	<u>8-15-18</u>	<i>A rising concern? After straws, balloons get more scrutiny</i>	www.voanews.com/a/a-rising-concern-after-straws-balloons-get-more-scrutiny/4529690.html