

Keep Britain

Tidy



Eco-Schools has been operated by Keep Britain Tidy in England since 1994. Keep Britain Tidy aims to change behaviour permanently by working with people, businesses and government to spotlight the litter problem daily and offer creative solutions to solve it.

Why Release Balloons?

Hundreds, often thousands, of helium filled balloons are released around the world – at corporate and sporting events; open days; weddings and many other special occasions. The effect can be colourful and help generate publicity.

The Problem

Many of the balloons released fall back down to Earth and become a source of litter, balloons litter becomes a danger to animals who can mistake it for food. The most effective way to combat the problem is to not release balloons in the first place.

How Big is the Problem?

The Marine Conservation Society (MCS) has carried out surveys, relating to beach litter, regularly since 1996 and have seen an increase in balloon litter levels. In 2004, a worldwide beach clean-up found over 63,000 discarded balloons on beaches. The MCS say that every year balloon litter is responsible for the death of marine animals through ingestion or entanglement in balloon pieces.

The Law

Many local authorities have banned balloon releases, but on a national level they are not illegal. At the moment, it would be a matter for a courtroom to decide whether a ball release is an act of littering.

Keep Britain Tidy's View

Keep Britain Tidy understands balloon releases can be part of a special day, but it is clear that balloon releases can harm animals. The best way to prevent problems caused by balloon releases is to not release them in the first place, it is fine to have balloon at even but do not release them.

Anything Else?

Chinese lanterns are also a threat to wildlife; if people are thinking about holding an outdoor event decorative lanterns should be secured to the ground and not let off.



Balloon Releases



In recent years, many schools have held balloon releases as a focal point in celebratory or commemorative events and sometimes even to raise funds. However, often schools who participate in balloon releases don't realise the negative effects released balloons can have on the environment. All released balloons (including those marketed as biodegradable) eventually return to Earth as litter. Upon their return to Earth, they pose a serious threat to wildlife. If an animal swallows a balloon it can cause them to starve. Animals can also become tangled in their ribbons and strings. Many different types of marine and land animals have died due to balloon releases and at Eco-Schools we feel they simply can't carry on. There are many alternatives to balloon releases and here are some of our favourites:

- A Thunderclap is when a message is created that supporters can all share on their social media platform at exactly the same time. To do this in schools, ask older students and younger pupil's parents to share a chosen message across their social media at exactly the same time. The thunderclap was invented in Iceland – another country with Eco-Schools.
- Planting trees or flowers has long been used as an eco-friendly way to remember classes or people that have moved on. Luckily, schools can often get tree saplings for free.
- A group kite flight is similar to a balloon release as it's a great spectacle, it's also more fun as you have control of the kites and can keep them afterwards.
- If you live near a stream or small river you could drop flowers or petals in and watch them float calmly down the stream to give a beautiful spectacle and a sense of letting go.
- It is easy to purchase equipment to create huge bubbles and these could easily replace balloon releases without harming the environment.
- If a class is leaving your school, why not gather their handprints to create clay or paint collages to display as a visual reminder of their time at your school.
- Children could paint stones to be placed within a special area of the school grounds. These will last a lifetime and look amazing.
- Flash mobs are an effective way to spread a message and leave an impression that will last longer than a balloon release.
- You could hold a mass gathering: having people come together to create a shape, word or image can be very unifying. You can also take photos of the gathering from a higher vantage point to remember it forever.
- If despite reading all of these amazing ideas you are still thinking about balloons you can take part in a virtual balloon release online, these are really easy to find!



Glitter



At Eco-Schools we realise that glitter has been an important and fun part of school life for many years. However, what many people don't realise is that whilst glitter looks great, it's actually a microplastic that can cause damage to our wildlife and environment. Glitter and other microplastics are particularly hazardous to our ocean life. We use glitter and other microplastics as we think they look nice, unfortunately, when microplastics eventually end up in our oceans marine animals also find them rather appealing. Their size makes them an attractive (but very dangerous) food item. Marine animals as tiny as plankton and as big as whales have been found to eat plastics, often with fatal consequences. Research has also reported that plastic has been found in a third of UK-caught fish. In response to the damage glitter can do to our oceans, we have compiled our list of more Eco-Friendly, yet equally fun, alternatives:

- Any fallen leaves you find can be turned into free glitter simply by using a standard hole-punch.
- You could also use a hole-punch to turn other items into glitter. Why not ask the children in your class to save their colourful wrapping paper or cards from birthdays and Christmas and hole punch them to re-use as glitter.
- Create a glitter garden in your school, plant the most vibrant flowers you can and regularly (and carefully) pick a few petals off when required, cut into tiny pieces and you will have adorable and natural glitter!
- Lentils are small, cheap and available in brown, yellow, green, red and black varieties: great for arts and crafts!
- Salt glitter is made from 1 tablespoon of Epsom salt, 1 tablespoon of table salt and 4 – 5 drops of natural food colouring. Add these ingredients to a plastic or glass container, stir with a spoon, pop the lid on and give a really good shake before leaving to dry for around an hour. Store in an airtight container in a cool, dry place for up to six months.
- As well as salt, you can also create edible sugar glitter (although we don't recommend eating it). Simply mix $\frac{1}{2}$ a cup of raw sugar with $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp of food colouring, bake on a foil lined tray for 10 minutes at 150 degrees Celsius. Allow the sugar to cool and make sure you store it away from direct light in an airtight container.
- Hit the baking aisle of your local shop to find many alternatives to glitter that are usually used to decorate cakes.

Recently, we have noticed that many companies are beginning to offer biodegradable glitter. At Eco-Schools we would not recommend using biodegradable glitter as whilst it may degrade eventually this can take months and does plenty of damage in the meantime.



Single-Use Plastics



Unfortunately, due to convenience there is often still an abundance of single-use plastics in school. However, whilst single-use plastic can be convenient for us, they are going to be very inconvenient for future generations. A simple plastic straw can take up to 200 years to decompose and a plastic bag can take up to 500 years. It is not fair that we are creating a problem that will have to be dealt with by future generations: it is important we try to halt the use of single-use plastics now as we are doing long lasting damage to the Earth, that we are already beginning to see! At Eco-Schools we have created a list of alternates to the single-use plastics that are common in schools:

- We all enjoy drinking out of straws and we know they are important to people with specific needs, but we also love our planet and want to protect it. Rather than using plastics straws you can switch to a more environmentally friendly alternative. Paper straws are readily available, but they are also single-use. The best straw alternatives we have found are bamboo and metal straws as they have no taste, look great and can be re-used.
- We are fortunate enough to live in a country where safe drinking water is available from taps, there is no reason to buy bottled water. We recommend purchasing a reusable bottle – there are many different types and designs available that look amazing.
- If you like a hot drink, say no to plastic stirrers - wooden stirrers are just as cheap and easy to purchase: even better use a teaspoon (they are literally designed to stir hot drinks).
- Plastic cutlery can save time on washing up, but it is expensive and terrible for the environment. We recommend using metal cutlery, putting some music on and enjoying a moment of relaxation whilst washing the cutlery afterwards. If your school don't want to use reusable cutlery, at least switch to wooden disposable cutlery.
- If your school serves sandwiches or hot takeaway food encourage lunchtime staff to serve these items in paper bags or other non-plastic, recyclable packaging.
- Instead of bringing your lunch in in a plastic bag that gets thrown away at the end of the day, invest in a lunchbox, there are so many designs available in all shapes and sizes – be proud to use one.
- Whilst coffee cups look fairly environmentally friendly, often they're not as they contain a plastic film that is tightly bounded to the paper making them very difficult to recycle. Instead of using takeaway cups encourage the use of reusable coffee cups by offering large discounts.
- Clingfilm is rubbish (literally after you have finished with it). Place food in reusable containers: this will also stop your sandwiches getting squashed!



Litter



Litter blights our schools, streets, parks and beaches and costs us millions of pounds to clear up every year. Eco-Schools and Keep Britain Tidy want to eliminate litter now and for future generations.

During your Green Flag Award Assessment, we expect your school grounds to be as litter free as possible: even if you aren't working on our Litter topic. Below are the photographs we give our Assessors to decide whether your school is a pass or fail during your Green Flag Assessment.



Pass



Fail

