

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1178

As Reported By House Committee On:
Environmental Affairs

Title: An act relating to the release of lighter-than-air balloons.

Brief Description: Prohibiting the release of lighter-than-air balloons.

Sponsors: Representatives Jacobsen, Ogden, J. Kohl, G. Cole, R. Fisher, Dunshee, Valle, Appelwick, Pruitt, Johanson and Leonard.

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
Environmental Affairs, February 18, 1993, DPS.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 8 members: Representatives Rust, Chair; Flemming, Vice Chair; Bray; Foreman; Holm; L. Johnson; J. Kohl; and Linville.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 5 members: Representatives Horn, Ranking Minority Member; Van Luven, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Edmondson; Hansen; and Sheahan.

Staff: Harry Reinert (786-7110).

Background: The release of large numbers of balloons at celebrations and other events has caused some concern about the potential impact on animals and the environment. The concerns are that the balloons, when they descend, may be swallowed by marine or land animals resulting in injury or death, that animals may become entangled in balloons that are tied together, and that they will litter shorelines and other natural areas. There is also some risk of power outages when certain types of balloons become entangled with power lines.

At least three states -- Florida, Connecticut, and Tennessee -- have enacted statutes which restrict to some degree the intentional release of balloons.

Summary of Substitute Bill: The intentional release of 25 or more balloons in a 24-hour period is prohibited. The prohibition does not apply to scientific experiments or hot air balloons which are recovered.

A violation of the prohibition is a class 1 civil infraction. The maximum penalty for a class 1 civil infraction is \$250.

A person may petition the district court to prevent a violation of the statute.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The original bill applied to releases of 10 or more balloons.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: Balloons have caused the deaths of some wildlife. Balloons are also a litter problem and have been found on beaches and in wilderness areas. Balloons that are claimed to be biodegradable may take more than three years to actually degrade.

Testimony Against: The claims of harm to wildlife is overstated. Balloons are biodegradable. Balloons that are released into the atmosphere frequently break into small fragments. There is a thriving small business industry that is dependent on balloons and that will be adversely impacted by this bill.

Witnesses: Casey Lane, Assumption School (pro); Katie Hiestand, Assumption School (pro); Anna Teks, Assumption School (pro); Jack Lovejoy, Assumption School (pro); Will Doddario, Assumption School (pro); Kimberly A. Menstell, Seattle City Watershed (pro); Brad Everson, Department of Ecology (pro); Patricia Howie (con); Stu Halsan, The Balloon Council (con); Bill Fritz, The Balloon Council (con); Marvin L. Hardy, Balloon Magic (con); Penny L. Hardy, Balloon Magic (con); and Marlyta Deck, Washington State Fairs Association (con).