



# University of Hawaii at Manoa

Environmental Center  
Crawford 317 • 2550 Campus Road  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96822  
Telephone (808) 948-7361

RL:0769

## HB 2991 HD 1 RELATING TO POLLUTION

Statement for  
Senate Committee on  
Planning and Environment

By

Jacquelin Miller, Environmental Center  
John Harrison, Environmental Center  
Sheila Conant, General Science

HB 2991 HD 1 would amend Section 339-1 of the Hawaii Revised Statutes by expanding the definition of "litter" to add rubber objects including helium-filled balloons; by setting forth responsibility for public awareness of the environmental effects of helium-filled balloon litter; and by amending Section 708-829 HRS to prohibit the release of ten or more helium-filled balloons into the atmosphere.

Our statement on this bill does not represent an institutional position of the University of Hawaii.

Previous testimony has pointed out the hazards to various types of biota such as sea birds, marine turtles, and even monk seals and whales when they mistakenly ingest rubber or foil balloons. Specific reports have documented this problem. While we are certainly concerned with the hazard to marine life and birds that the release of large numbers of helium-filled, rubber or latex balloons presents, there is another aspect of this issue that should be given equal consideration.

The cost of beach, park, and street cleaning and maintenance of other public areas is a direct result of the volumes of litter produced. The volume and problem of litter pollution in the state has been recognized in the introduction of several litter related bills and the testimony by state departments, conservation organizations, and the University. The release of large numbers of balloons is a source of litter, albeit they may not impact the state directly since most of them undoubtedly find their way to the ocean, their real damage may be in the message they convey to the public. That message is that littering, on a grand scale, is acceptable if done for a celebration or worthy cause and that somehow it is not littering because it is obviously condoned by the state. From this rationale, it is easy to see how one could then conclude, if its permitted to release 10,000 items (balloons) into the environment why worry about a single can, sack, or styrofoam cup.

Opponents of this bill have cited the short degradation time for the rubber or latex balloons as reason to continue the practice. We have no knowledge of the studies that have been conducted to determine degradation times in various environments, including the sea. Perhaps it is only a few weeks. Perhaps it is much longer. The important point from our perspective is the message such a release conveys. There are alternative means of advertising an event. We suggest that alternatives to the use of helium filled balloons should be required.