



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Contact:** Helen Henderson

Ocean Program Manager

American Littoral Society

732-546-2514

**May 7, 2019**

## **The American Littoral Society and ANJEC Salute Municipalities that have Passed Ordinances Banning Single-use Plastic Waste**

The American Littoral Society and The Association of NJ Environmental Commissions (ANJEC) today joined state and municipal leaders from across New Jersey in celebration of the many local actions that have been taken to combat the rising tide of plastic pollution.

“The American Littoral Society is especially grateful to the more than 20 municipalities that have adopted ordinances banning the intentional release of balloons,” said Helen Henderson, Ocean Program Manager for the Littoral Society. “Soft plastics, like balloons, are the type of pollution most likely to cause death in birds and turtles who ingest them, and animals can also become entangled in the attached balloon ribbons.”

Balloons are a form of plastic pollution that is especially harmful to marine life. Sea turtles and birds often mistake balloons as food and animals can also become entangled in the attached ribbons. Balloons are high on the list of items collected at beach cleanups.

The awareness and concern about this type of pollution is growing beyond NJ municipalities, helping to create a meaningful regional effort. Communities on Long Island, NY have prohibited balloon releases and coastal towns in Delaware are preparing similar ordinances.

Numerous states have already made releases illegal, including California, Connecticut, Florida, Tennessee and Virginia and many others are considering such legislation such as Arizona, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York and Rhode Island.

Preventing plastic pollution is so critical to the health of the ocean and coast that regional entities such as the Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean (MARCO) -- which includes the five states of NY, NJ, DE, MD, and VA -- are studying, documenting, and educating about marine debris with a current focus on balloons.

Jersey Shore communities have been among the earliest to embrace efforts to reduce single-use plastics, perhaps partly due to the visible impact of plastic waste on their beaches. About 82 percent of the trash picked up during Clean Ocean Action's beach cleanups in 2018 was plastic and Styrofoam waste, according to their most recent report.

Asbury Park, NJ is among the dozens of New Jersey municipalities that have joined the movement by enacting ordinances to reduce plastic pollution, including a ban on intentional balloon releases. The city will introduce a plastic bag ban and fee structure ordinance at their May 8<sup>th</sup> meeting.

The Borough of Bradley Beach has passed ordinances banning both plastic bags and mass balloon releases.

"Bradley Beach is proud to join the growing ranks of municipalities, and especially beach communities, who are taking overdue action to address plastic pollutants in our ocean. We are blessed with a proactive Environmental Commission that led this effort in the Borough," said Mayor Gary Engelstad.

Ocean Gate, NJ passed an ordinance regulating plastic bags, food containers and straws that will go into effect in September.

"Everyone has to be more conscious of their surroundings and be very mindful of the way they take care of household debris and waste," said Ocean Gate Mayor Paul Kennedy. "We have a beautiful one-mile beach & boardwalk along the Toms River and I would hate to see the day that people wouldn't be able to go in the water because of human neglect."

"We are so proud of the work local communities are doing to cut back on the amount of plastic waste that eventually ends up polluting our streams and rivers," said ANJEC Executive Director Jennifer Coffey. "As part of our mission to support local environmental action throughout the state, ANJEC has been working for the past four years with municipal environmental commissions and other organizations to educate communities and state officials on the importance of plastics legislation and the dire need to reduce plastic consumption."

The various plastic ordinances enacted by New Jersey communities differ somewhat in their requirements. Dozens of towns, including Longport, Hoboken and Jersey City, require merchants to charge customers a fee for a plastic bag or ban the dispensing of bags outright.

While potential loss of business is a common fear among merchants when bag bans are proposed, experience has shown that public reaction has been positive in the Township of Long Beach, one of the first NJ communities to ban single-use plastic bags in November 2017.

"The bag ban has been a success," said Long Beach Mayor Joseph Mancini. "The business owners came on board quickly and public engagement was successful through our reusable bag giveaway program. We made it through the first tourism season strong."

Many shore communities, like Point Pleasant Beach, have banned mass balloon releases, not only because of the litter they cause but the harm they cause to marine life.

"As a popular seaside community with a good number of ocean-side weddings, parties and celebrations, balloon releases of all sizes and shapes were occurring regularly in Point Pleasant Beach," said Point Pleasant Beach Councilman Paul Kanitra. "At beach cleanup after beach cleanup, we were continually finding the deflated remnants on our beaches and in our waters."

Our balloon release ban and the accompanying penalties have significantly curbed this practice in town and we're seeing the effects already in the short time since its enactment."

### **Why plastic pollution is so bad**

Of all trash, plastic waste has the greatest potential to harm the environment, wildlife and humans, according to the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). It can be found in almost all water bodies and is transported by rivers to the ocean. There it moves with the currents, and is often eaten by birds and fish, concentrating toxic chemicals in their tissues, and filling their stomachs, causing them to starve.

A 2016 study published by The World Economic Forum and the Ellen MacArthur Foundation showed that if single-use plastic waste continued at the current rate, our oceans would contain more plastic than fish by 2050 (measured by weight).

"NJEL urges municipalities: Don't wait for the State! The State is waiting for you," said Noemi de la Puente of NJ Environmental Lobby at the May 7 event. "The faster townships deal with disposable plastic, the better off they will be in the future as landfill space in the northeast diminishes, and the cleaner the township will be because litter will diminish. We can't recycle our way out of this disposable plastic problem. We generate bags by the billions. Recycling will never, ever catch up with our plastic waste, especially with China closing its doors to American recycling streams. We owe it to our children and grandchildren -- don't leave them stuck with our tons and tons of plastic waste."

"New Jersey can and must soon adopt legislation banning the needless and harmful practice of balloon releases and also take up the issue of single use plastic bags once again" added Henderson. "Until that time, we will continue to encourage and celebrate our local champions who are making a difference now" she concluded.

###

*Leaders in coastal conservation since 1961, the American Littoral Society, a 501 (c)3 non-profit organization, promotes the study and conservation of marine life and habitat, protects the coast from harm, and empowers others to do the same.*

*ANJEC, a statewide nonprofit based in Mendham, is celebrating its 50th year of supporting environmental action at the local level by educating environmental commissions, green teams, open space committees, local officials and concerned citizens working to protect and restore the environment in their communities. ANJEC advocates for sound public policies at the state and national level and collaborates with organizations on regional initiatives that safeguard natural resources. For more information, visit [www.anjec.org](http://www.anjec.org).*