

The Hidden Dangers of Mylar Balloons: Keep Eyes On Them and Keep the Lights On

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ALTON – It is graduation season in the Riverbend, and with all the bittersweet emotions of change in the air, many forget to keep eyes on their ceremonial balloons purchased by friends and family members to commemorate the big day.

Those balloons, however, can cause nightmares' worth of troubles for the area. Outside of their environmental impact and danger to pets, Mylar balloons can also cause power outages. A representative from Ameren Illinois said as many as three outages in the area were caused by Mylar balloons during Valentine's Day – another time of the year notorious for balloons. Often, these balloons cause problems for power lines, even when it's not a full-blown outage.

Because of that, Ameren Illinois sent local media a press release regarding the dangers of these balloons. The release describes Mylar balloons as metallic, meaning they do conduct electricity. This means they cause surges and shorts when they reach the height of power lines, where they often become tangled. This causes additional issues for line workers when they have to respond to the calls of tangled balloons often following balloon-centric holidays.

“We realize this is the time of year when everyone is outside celebrating new graduates, newlyweds, birthdays and spring holidays,” Ameren Illinois Senior Vice President of Operations and Technical Services Ron Pate said in a release. “Keeping the balloons tethered and weighted while in used and then properly puncturing and disposing after the fact can help to ensure they do not get loose and end up in our power lines and substations.”

Anyone who sees such a balloon entangled in electrical infrastructure is asked to contact Ameren Illinois at 800-755-5000 and not interact with the balloon.

“Mylar balloon-related outages are more common than one might imagine,” Pate added. “A little extra precaution can truly help us keep the lights on.”

As many as 3,000 customers in Maryville and Collinsville lost services for as long as a few hours last year when balloons became tangled in power lines.