



Ameren Illinois Highlights Safety Risks With Mylar Balloon Releases

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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ALTON - With graduations, weddings and many holiday ceremonies on tap for summer, concerns arise with Ameren Illinois about proper balloon disposal.

Brian Bretsch, a spokesperson for Ameren Illinois, said on Wednesday, April 24, 2024, mylar balloons can cause quite a headache for the Ameren Illinois electric grid.

The Ameren Illinois Public Relations spokesperson said Ameren Illinois is not trying to be the balloon police but just make sure they are properly disposed of after a celebration.

Bretsch said mylar balloons, also known as foil balloons, are made from nylon with a metallic coating. Mylar balloons are often used to celebrate birthdays, graduations, and weddings. Unfortunately, people have a tendency once the celebration is over to release the balloons.

"The problem is the metallic coating makes for an excellent conductor of electricity," Bretsch said. "When the balloon touches a power line or gets tangled up in substation equipment, it generates a surge of electricity, causing power lines to short-circuit."

What sort of outages have these mylar balloons caused?

"We have had 50 mylar-related balloon outages since 2021 across our Ameren service territory," Bretsch said. "With your viewers and Ameren Illinois customers heading outside to enjoy the warmer temperatures, so do the parties they host with balloons.

"The average outage duration was 104 minutes, impacting an average of 175 customers per balloon incident."

Bretsch cited these examples of large-scale outages because of balloons the past three years.

- The largest singular outage happened in Champaign affecting 2,691 customers for 49 minutes. June 6, 2021
- Balloons in a Gilman substation impacted 1,020 customers for 3.5 hours, June 22, 2021.
- Balloons entangled in power lines in Mt. Vernon – 560 customers without power for 2 hours, 12 minutes.

Do rubber balloons cause the same issues with electric equipment?

Bretsch said the question comes to him asking do rubber balloons cause the same issues with electric equipment?

"Rubber balloons will not conduct with our electrical equipment. However, we do receive as many calls about rubber balloons being in our electric equipment," he said.

"Oftentimes our line workers still need to enter the energized zone to remove these balloons, potentially putting the line workers in harm's way."

Proper Mylar Balloon Disposal

"It's important to note that we want people to use balloons at celebrations," he said. "We are reminding our customers to properly dispose of the balloons at the end of the celebration to avoid safety hazards and damage to the electric grid."

Bretsch added for people to keep the following tips in mind:

- Keep balloons tethered at all times and attached to a weight.
- When no longer in use, puncture and deflate the balloons before creatively reusing or disposing of them.
- Never tie a metallic ribbon on your balloon. Also, never tie a metallic balloon to a child's arm. These both can pose substantial electrical threats.
- If a balloon or another toy becomes entangled in an overhead power line, do not attempt to retrieve it. Call Ameren Illinois at 1-800-755-5000 for assistance.

Always assume power lines are live, and keep yourself, others and pets at least 10 feet away.