



# Social Marketing Research in Action

## A Social Science Approach to Addressing Mass Balloon Releases

March 7, 2016

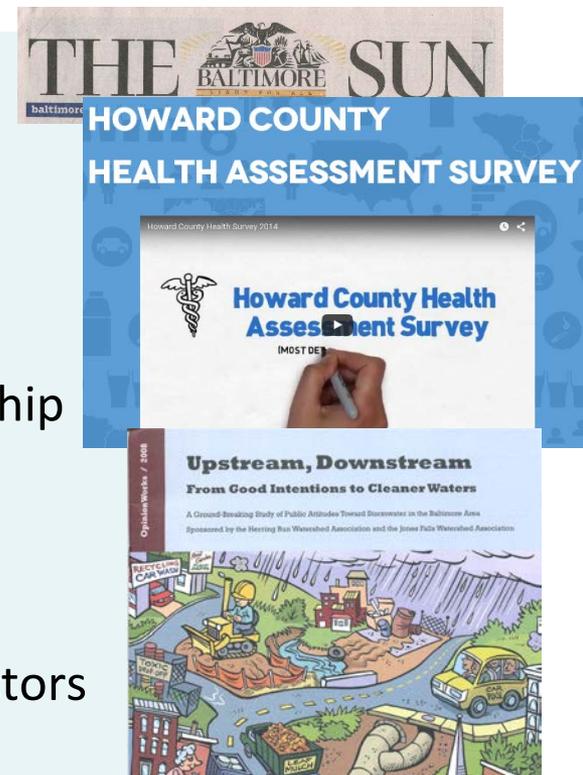
Steve Raabe, President

**OPINIONWORKS**  
PUBLIC SPIRITED RESEARCH

# Social Marketing in Action

## OpinionWorks Credentials

- Measure perceptions, behaviors
- Random samples, focus groups
  - *The Baltimore Sun* polling
  - Chesapeake Bay Program
    - Extensive work assessing citizen stewardship
  - Partnership for the Delaware Estuary
    - Public attitudes about water protection
  - Horizon Foundation & Partners
    - Complex study on health behavior risk factors
  - Columbus, OH Department of Health
    - Service needs for people living with HIV/AIDS
  - Virginia Cooperative Extension
    - Marketing sustainable lawn care



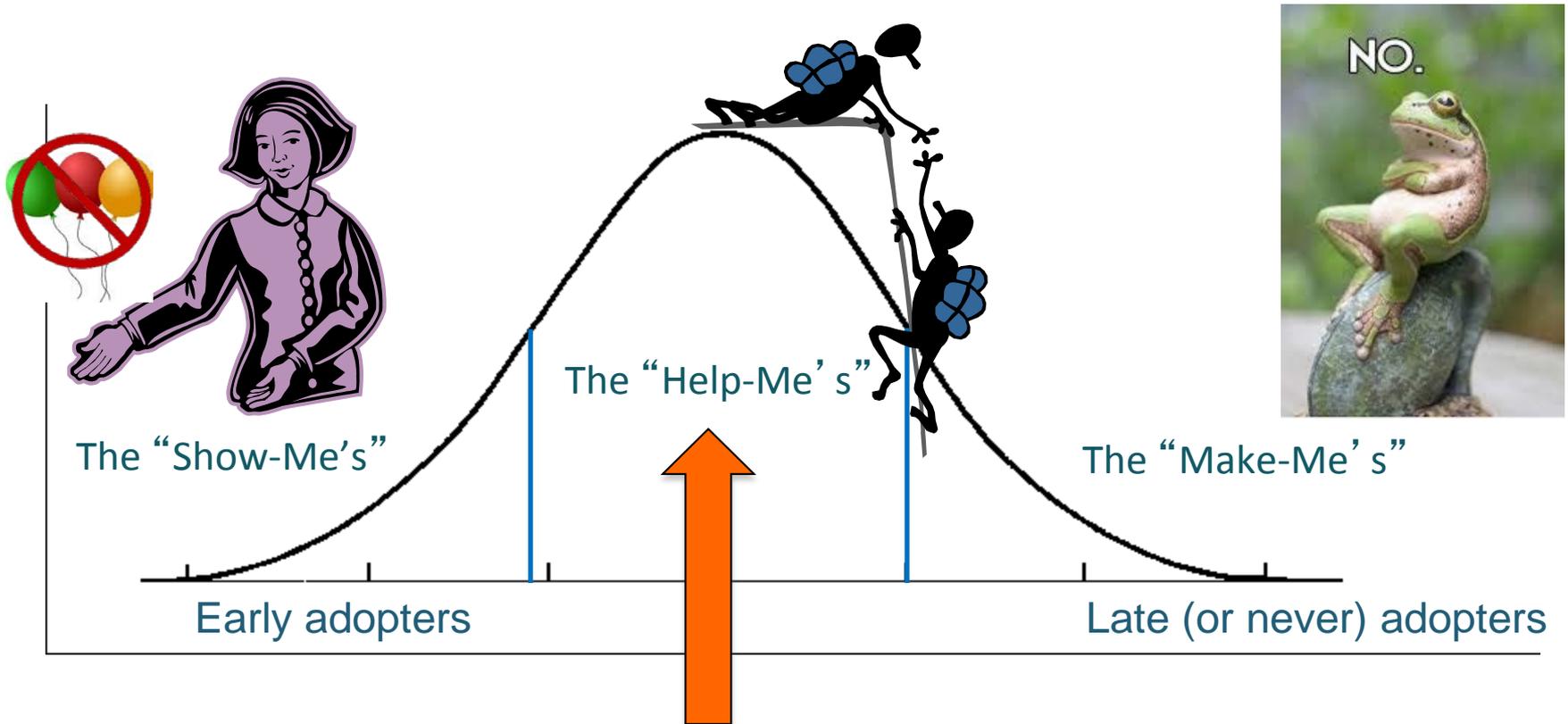


# Balloon Releases

# A Rising Concern: Reducing Balloon Release and Debris Through a Social Marketing Campaign



# Nancy Lee's Categories of People....



So, where should we focus our efforts as social marketers?

## A Rising Concern

# How Do We Reach the Help Me Group?

1. Identify the specific behavior you want the audience to take
2. Pinpoint your target audience
3. Assess the barriers to the action
4. Find the benefits and motivators that will overcome those barriers
5. Refine your messages, incentives, and tools, and determine where and how you will deliver them to the target audience

# The Behavior



**Joy, Bereavement, Commemoration**  
**Weddings, Graduations, Funerals, Campaigns**

# Target Audience



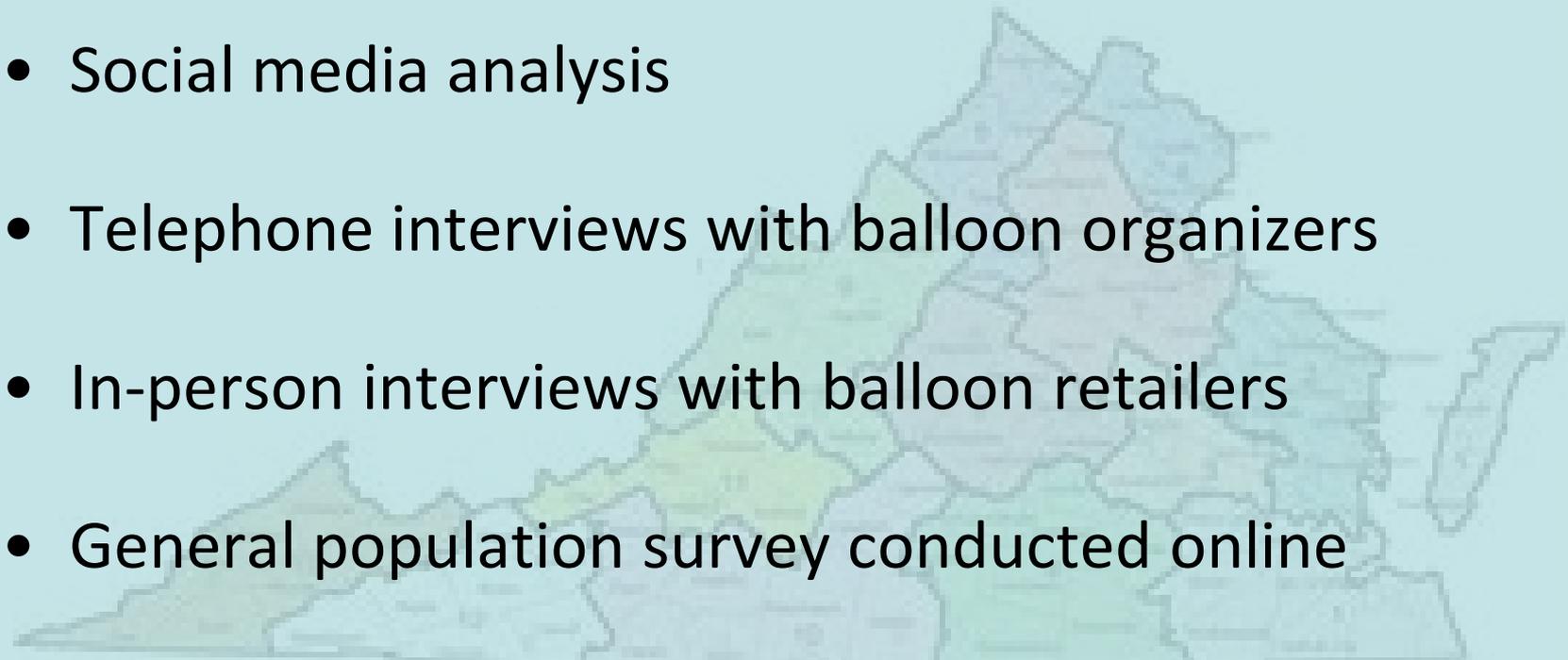
**Downstream Audience: Participants**

**Midstream Audience: Brides, Family Members, Event Organizers**

**Venues: Schools, Churches, Funeral Homes**

## A Rising Concern

# Formative Research Methodology

- National media analysis of balloon release events
  - Social media analysis
  - Telephone interviews with balloon organizers
  - In-person interviews with balloon retailers
  - General population survey conducted online
  - Focus groups with organizers and participants
- 

Thank you for taking part in this study for Longwood University about the use and release of helium balloons. This survey is voluntary and confidential. You will not be asked for your name or other personal identifying information, and your responses will not be connected back to you in any way.

1. In the last 10 years or so have you taken part in an event or ceremony where balloons were released, for example at a wedding, at school, at a memorial service, to call attention to a cause, or something like that?

- Yes (if "Yes", continue with Q3)     Can't remember (continue with Q12)     No (if "No", continue with Q2)

3. About how many times in the last 10 years have you taken part in an event or ceremony where balloons were released?

Enter a number:

4. During what months of the year have you taken part in a balloon release? *Mark any that apply.*

- Spring (Mar, Apr, May)     Summer (Jun, Jul, Aug)  
 Fall (Sep, Oct, Nov)     Winter (Dec, Jan, Feb)  
 Can't remember

5. The most recent time you took part in a balloon release, what was the cause or reason for the balloon release? *Mark one.*

- Wedding     Funeral or memorial service  
 Sporting event     Religious worship  
 To raise awareness for an issue or cause: Some other reason:  
 Can't remember

6. That most recent time, where did the balloon release take place? *Mark one.*

- School     Church or other house of worship  
 Park     Hospital     Community Center  
 Some other place: Can't remember

7. How would you describe the area where the balloons were released? *Mark any that apply.*

- Urban area     Suburban area  
 Small town     Rural area  
 Within a few miles of the ocean or Chesapeake Bay

8. Was the balloon release event in Virginia or outside Virginia?

- In Virginia     Outside Virginia

9. As far as you know, was this part of an annual or a one-time event?

- Annual     One-time     Don't know

10. What were the feelings that you experienced as the balloons were being released?

11. As the balloons were being released, did you think about where the balloons would end up after they went out of view?

- No     Yes, a little     Yes, a lot

(Continue with Q12)

2. Why haven't you taken part in a balloon release event or ceremony?

- I have not been invited or have never been present to take part in one  
 I have been invited and would have taken part, but was not available  
 I have been invited to take part but did not want to

(Continue with Q12)

12. Which of these best describes what happens to balloons when they are released into the air? *Mark one.*

- Disintegrate or break into very small bits in the atmosphere  
 Float out into space  
 Fall to the ground or water and break down naturally  
 Fall to the ground or water and do not break down  
 Something else:

13. If you are invited to take part in a balloon release in the future, or if you attend an event where one occurs, how likely are you to take part?

- Very likely  
 Somewhat likely  
 Might or might not  
 Somewhat unlikely  
 Very unlikely

14. Do you have any other comments you would like to make about balloon releases?

- Yes (please write comments on other side)     No

15. What is your age?

- Less than 18     50 to 64  
 18 to 34     65 or older  
 35 to 49

16. What is the last grade in school you completed?

- Up to 11<sup>th</sup> Grade  
 High school diploma or GED  
 Attended college or technical school  
 Bachelor's degree  
 Graduate degree

17. What is your gender?

- Female     Male

18. What is your home zip code?

Thank you for your participation in this survey.

# A Rising Concern Focus Group Method

## 5 Groups (Jul, Dec, Jan)

- Richmond (2)
- Virginia Beach (2)
- Roanoke (1)

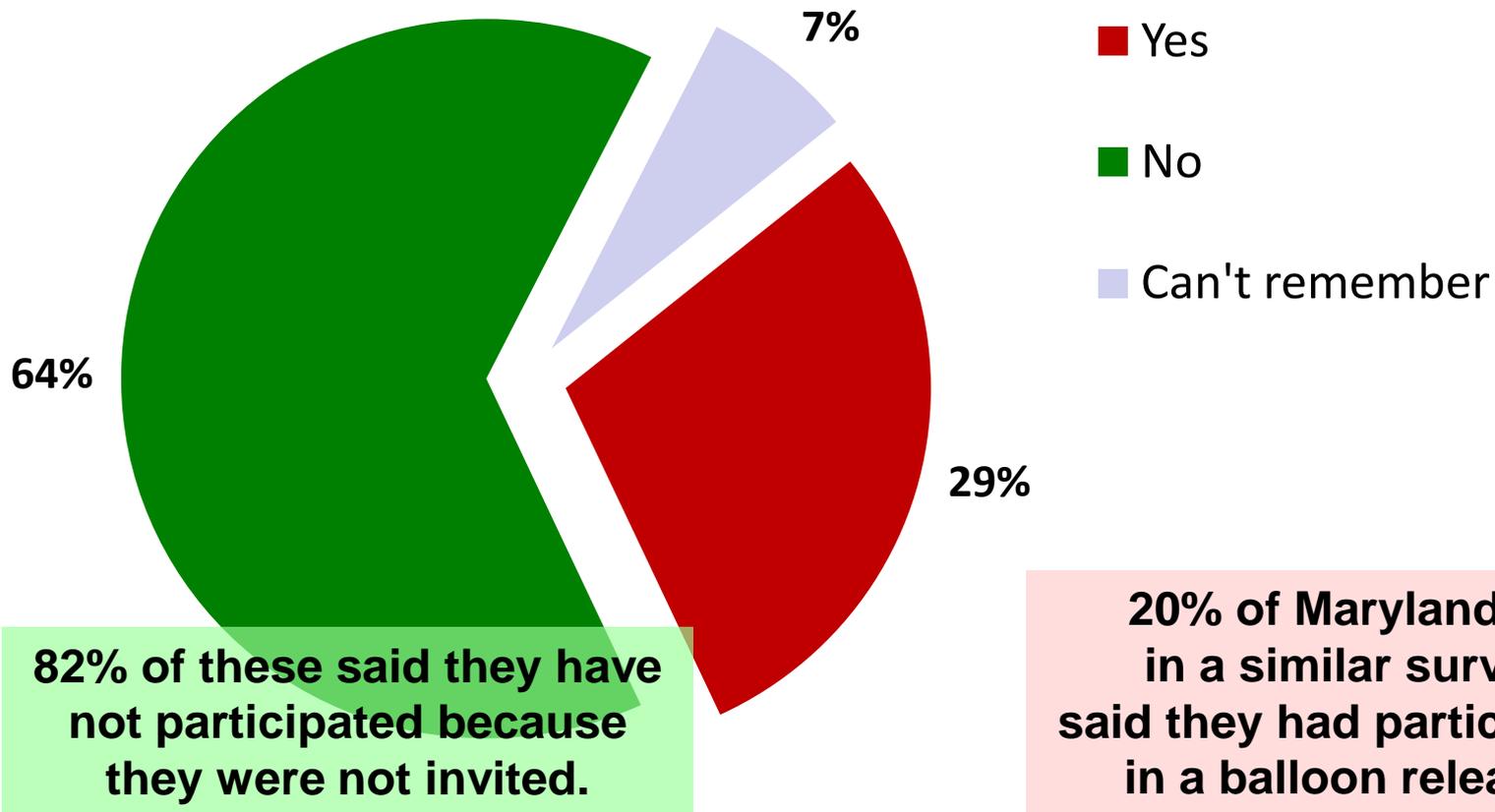


120-minute sessions, professionally facilitated

## Tested:

1. Experiences, Emotions
2. Counter-Messaging, Images
3. Alternatives, Trusted Messengers

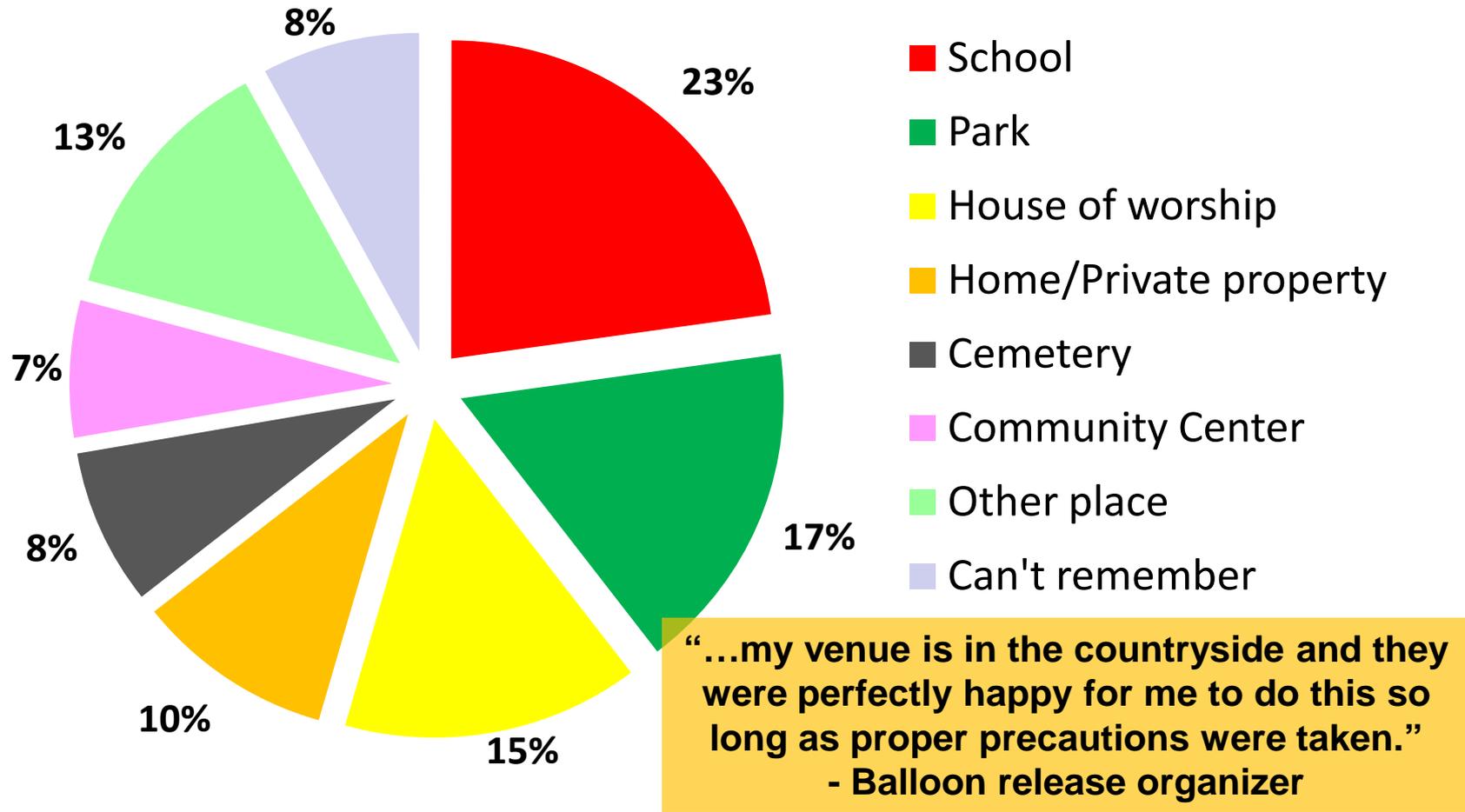
# A Rising Concern Have Taken Part in a Balloon Release



“In the last 10 years or so have you taken part in an event or ceremony where balloons were released, for example at a wedding, at school, at a memorial service, to call attention to a cause, or something like that?”

# A Rising Concern

## Location Where Balloon Release Took Place



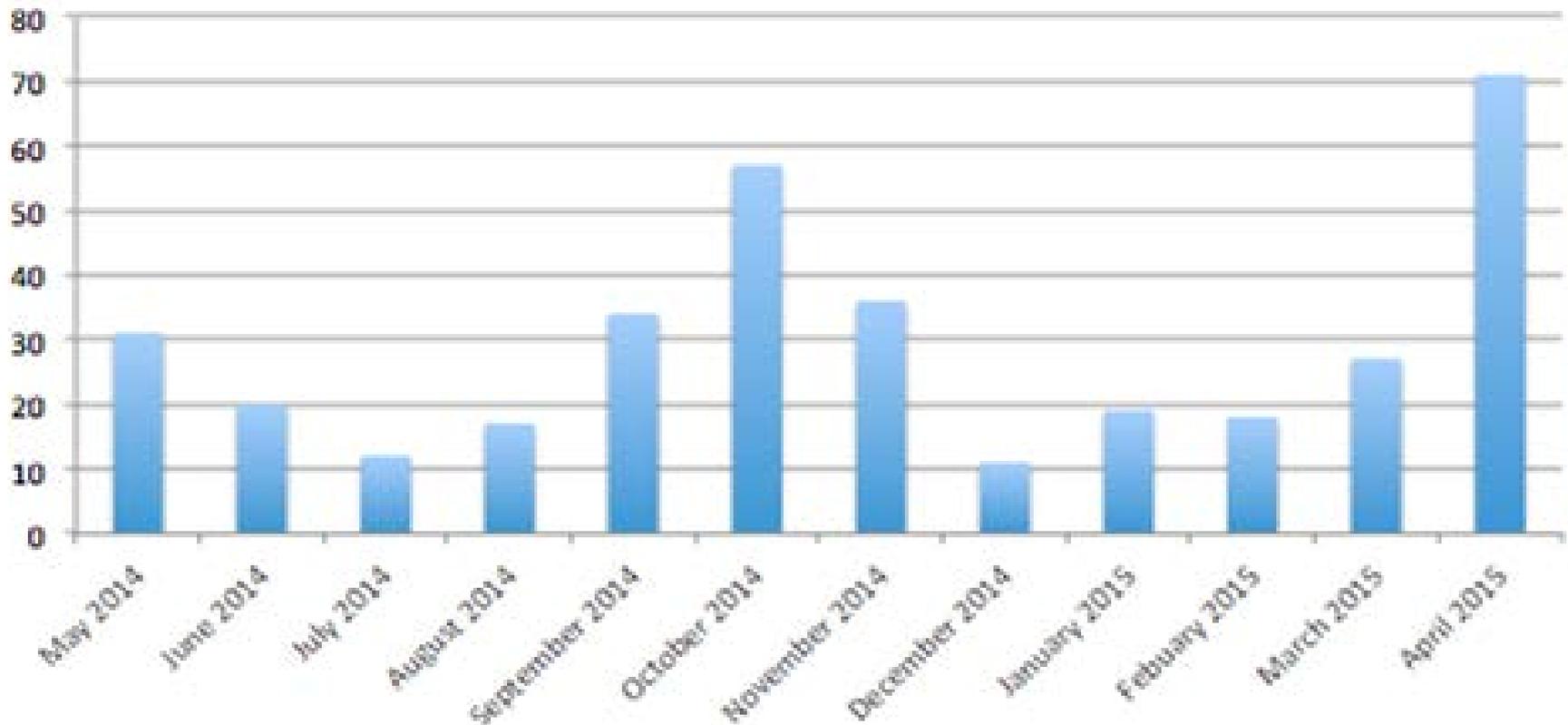
“That most recent time, where did the balloon release take place?”

# A Rising Concern

## Month When Balloon Release Took Place

### Balloon releases by month, USA.

May 1, 2014 to April 30, 2015

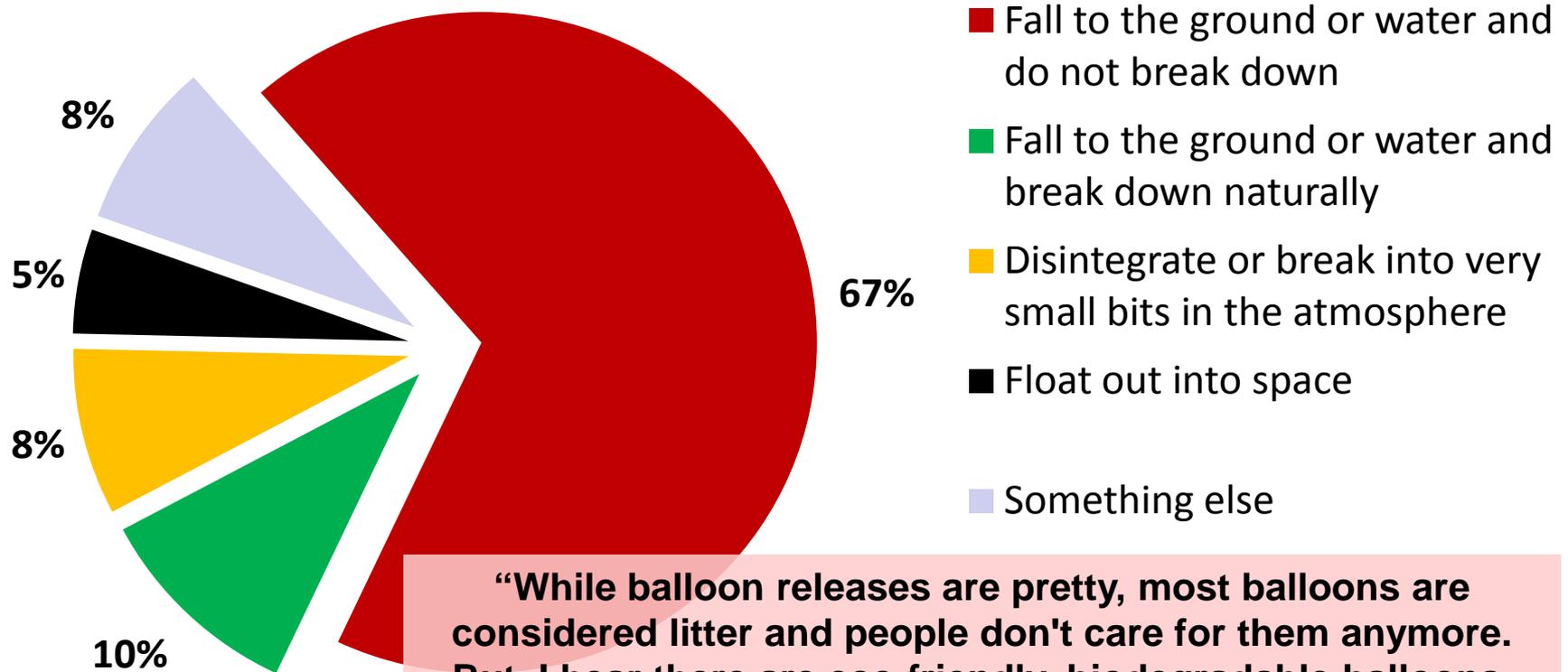


Noting this seasonality is important to outreach campaign design.

## A Rising Concern

# What Happens to Balloons When Released

*Impressions of People Who Participated in a Balloon Release*



**“While balloon releases are pretty, most balloons are considered litter and people don't care for them anymore. But, I hear there are eco-friendly, biodegradable balloons, in which case it would be great!”**  
- Balloon event organizer

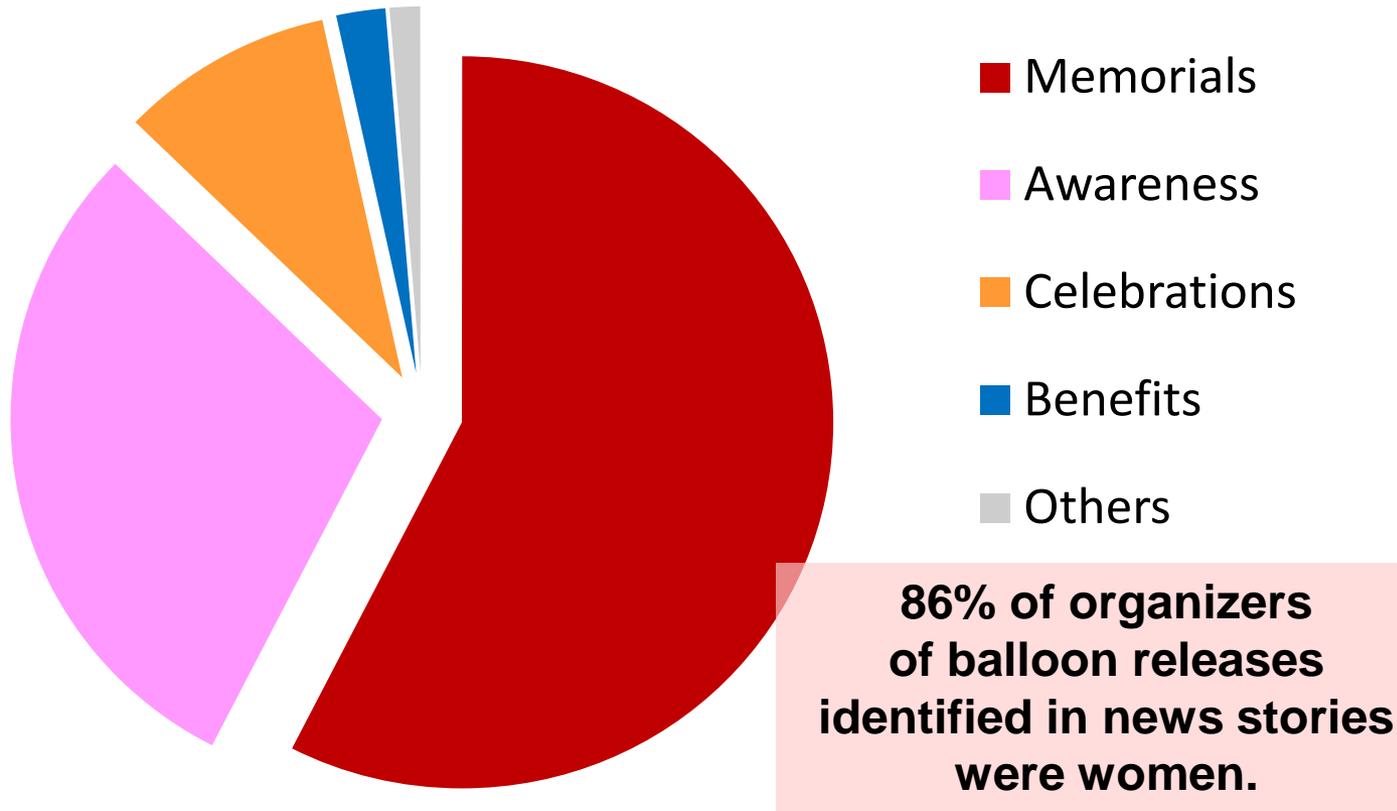
“Which of these best describes what happens to balloons when they are released into the air?”



Why?

# A Rising Concern

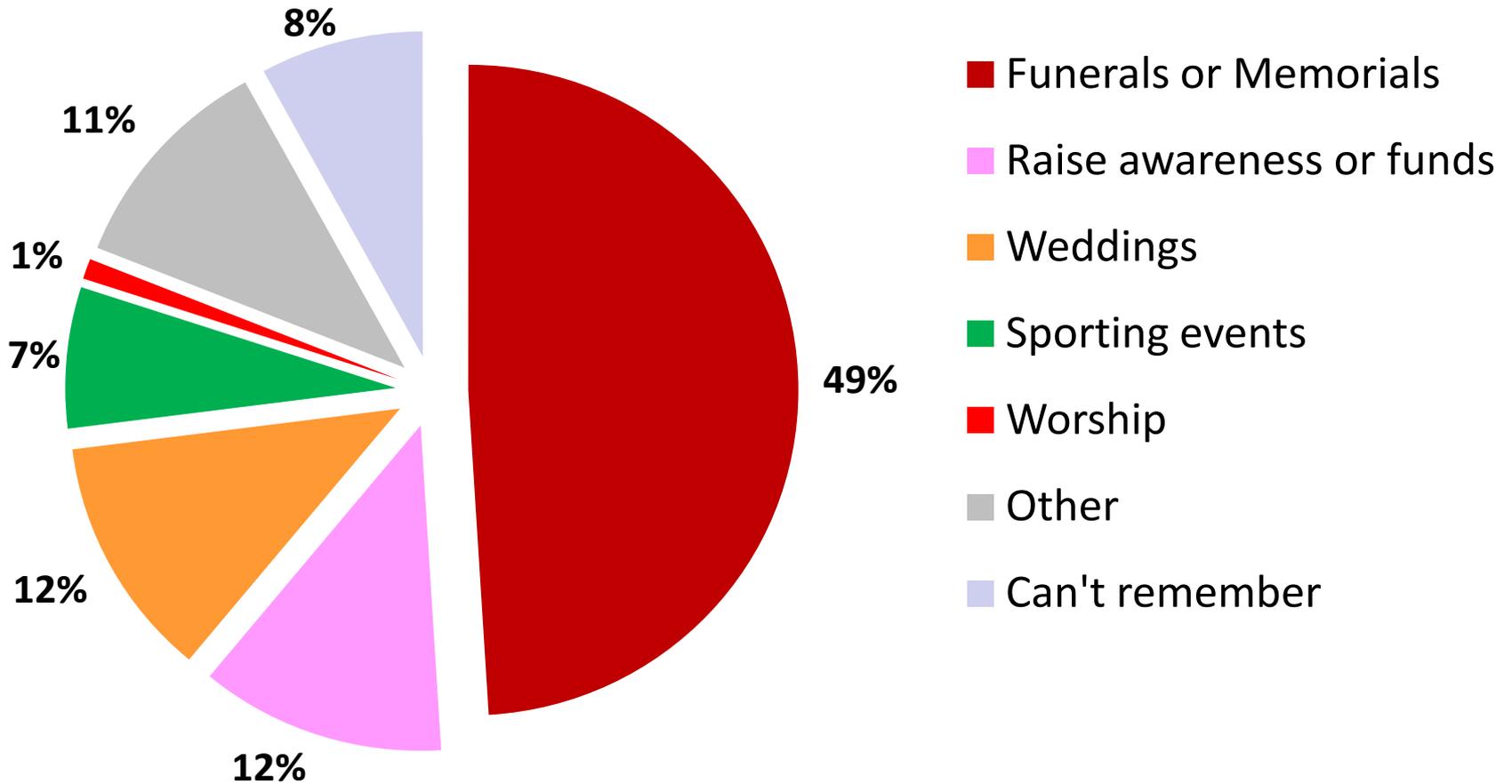
## Reasons for Balloon Releases



**We wondered if news media placed more emphasis on non-celebratory events.**

# A Rising Concern

## Reasons for Balloon Releases



Survey tracked closely with news analysis.

# A Rising Concern

## Reasons for Balloon Releases



**“When I lifted my eyes to see the balloons going up to the sky, I felt a peaceful emotion of hope in my sorrow as a widow. Through that wonderful experience, I remembered that my help to pass that painful moment will come from heaven.”**

**“Faculty and students were excited. The autism speech and the release of the balloons resulted in a very thought-provoking moment.”**

**“My 5-year-old son died one year ago and we had a balloon release at his funeral and at a 5k held in his honor. I feel like I am sending them to him and it gives us peace.”**

# A Rising Concern

## Reasons for Balloon Releases

**“Serenity”**

**“A sense of togetherness”**

**“Awesome!”**

**“Beautiful tribute to a life lost”**

**“Excitement”**

**“Freedom”**

**“Connected to the woman who had left us”**

**“A sense of peace”**

**“Release”**

**“Relief/Closure”**

**“Touching”**

**“Wonderful”**

# A Rising Concern Reasons for Balloon Releases



**“I will do what I want on my wedding day – it is my day!”**

**“...just because I’m doing a balloon release  
doesn’t mean I don’t care.”**

**“...I personally don’t see 3 balloons causing much of an issue.”**

**“Do what you want to do. The animals will be fine. I’m sure all  
these people telling you not to (release balloons) still drive cars  
and use hairspray or other chemicals dangerous to animals.”**



# Counter- Messaging

# A Rising Concern Wildlife Impact



**Mixed impact on audience.  
Some strongly moved. Others not.  
Species affinities come into play.**

# A Rising Concern Litter Impact



**High impact for some in audience.  
But remember, they tend to minimize  
their own contribution: “I just did it once.”  
“It was only five balloons.”**

## A Rising Concern

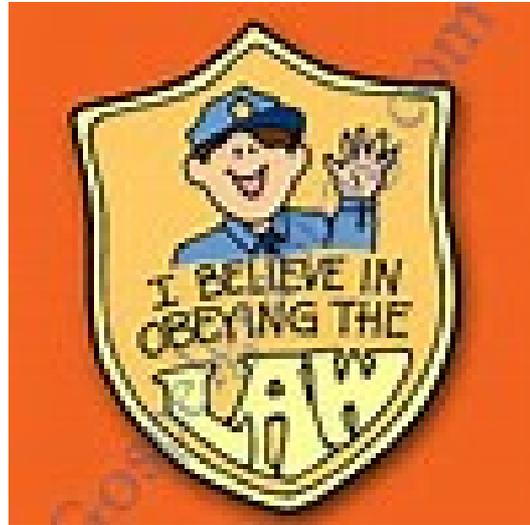
# Unexpected Impact: Electricity Outages



**16-20% of Power Outages Due to Balloons**  
**Unexpected Level of Concern by Audience**

# A Rising Concern

## Self-Restraint: Obey the Law



Courtesy of GospelGrabBag.com

**It is illegal to release 50+ balloons in Virginia.  
Just knowing that deters many law-abiding citizens.**

# A Rising Concern Exploration of Alternatives



**Nothing exactly duplicates the gratification  
of a balloon release.**



# Social Marketing Campaign Development



## A Rising Concern

# Social Marketing Campaign Development

- 1. Personalize the message: No one message reaches all**
- 2. Recognize rationalization, defensiveness: Be fact-based; try the softer sell**
- 3. Employ social media: Friendly social pressure works**
- 4. Work the upstream audiences: specifiers, venues, community partners**
- 5. Employ partners such as power company**

Stay Tuned