

HOW TO ESCAPE A RUNAWAY PARADE BALLOON

1 Watch for sudden changes in wind speed.

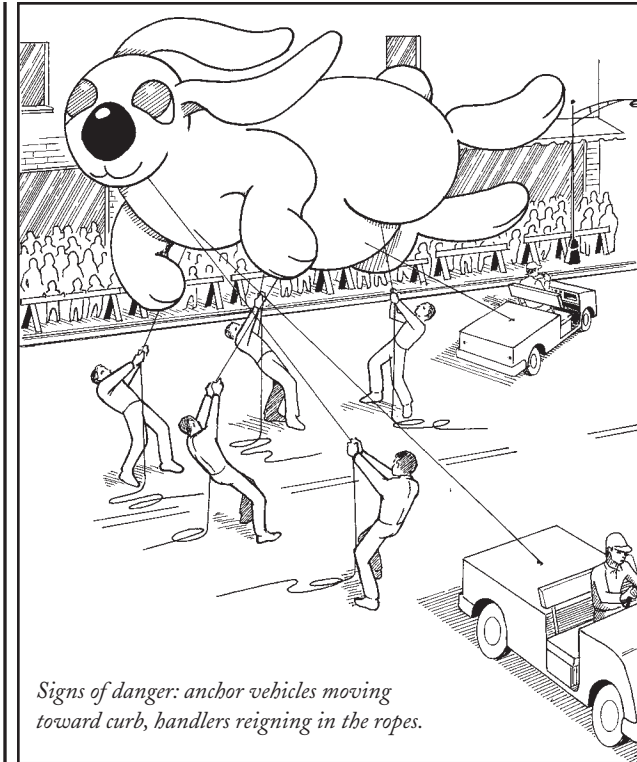
Parade balloons are only deployed if sustained winds are 23 mph or less, with gusts no more than 34 mph. If the winds exceed these levels during the parade, controlling the balloons becomes much more difficult. If you detect a significant change in wind speed or direction, look for other indications of danger.

2 Watch the anchor vehicles.

Large balloons (5,000 cubic feet and bigger) will be tethered to two anchor vehicles that look like oversized golf carts. These vehicles weigh two and a half tons each and act as failsafes, keeping a balloon from moving uncontrollably in case of emergency. In calm winds, the vehicles will be directly under the balloon and in the center of the street. If the anchor vehicles begin to move outward, toward the sidewalks, the wind is increasing substantially.

3 Watch the height of the balloon.

In calm winds, balloons will float at a maximum height of 50 feet. If the balloons are lower than this, winds may be dangerously high. In very strong winds, balloons may be almost at ground level.



4 Observe balloon handlers.

Each balloon has at least one handler; the largest balloons may have 50. Each handler holds a rope, and each rope is marked in foot increments. As winds increase, handlers will pull in their ropes and move into the wind for better control of the balloon in a headwind. If you see handlers reining in lots of rope, they are dealing with a clear and present danger.

5 Do not try to rescue a balloon.

It is difficult for an observer to gauge the enormity of a parade balloon, the tension in the ropes, and the amount of energy required to control a balloon in high winds. Lending a helping hand may seem easy, but the situation may be more out of control than it looks. Stay clear of the street and the balloon operators. Balloons and their handlers need lots of space to maneuver. Never attempt to pull on any ropes, and do not poke or prod any balloon.

6 Avoid lampposts and traffic lights.

The most immediate risk is that a runaway balloon may knock over a traffic light or lamppost, which will strike those standing below. Often, traffic lights are either removed or repositioned before the parade; if any remain, stay away from them.

7 Do not panic.

A stampeding crowd is a greater threat than a renegade balloon. If you have detected the early signs of danger and have responded, you will be moving ahead of the crowd.

8 Evacuate the area.

Seek safety away from the parade route, if you have time. You may take immediate shelter in a building or subway station.

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