

FirstEnergy Reminds Customers to Keep the Energy Alive this Valentine's Day by Properly Handling Foil Balloons

Balloon-related power outages spiked across FirstEnergy's footprint by 25% in 2020

AKRON, Ohio – FirstEnergy is reminding customers to fill the air with love, not helium-filled balloons this Valentine's Day. While foil balloons have increased in popularity as party and drive-by celebration decorations, they continue to cause many power outages because their metallic coating conducts electricity and poses a risk to the electric system.

“Many people are surprised to learn that stray balloons can drift into high-voltage equipment and cause power outages and other safety issues that impact our power system,” said Lisa Rouse, director of outage management at FirstEnergy. “Although these balloons are fun and festive, it is important for people to handle them properly so they do not get released into the sky and impact electric service.” Last year, foil balloons were to blame for 132 power outages across FirstEnergy's six-state service area—a 25% increase in balloon-related outages when compared to 2019. Over the past three years, stray balloons have caused about 355 power outages in areas served by FirstEnergy's electric companies.

Due to the popularity of Valentine's Day balloons, February typically marks the onset of a dramatic increase in outages caused by adrift metallic balloons that peaks in June, when warm weather takes celebrations and picnics outdoors. The spike in balloon-related power outages last year is likely attributed to drive-by celebrations during the pandemic. In fact, many outages over the summer coincided with school graduation parades involving dozens of cars decorated with foil balloons and signs.