Flying Lanterns
Introduction

Traditionally used in Chinese and Thai celebrations Flying Lanterns or Sky Lanterns are also known as ‘Khoom Fay’ or ‘Khoom Loy’ and have been used for thousands of years. It was believed that wishes written on lanterns would rise up to the heavens. They are now being promoted in the UK as an ideal way of celebrating weddings, birthdays, anniversaries, Chinese New Year, Diwali and any other special events.

Information supplied by some manufacturers claim that it will fly for approximately 6 to 8 minutes with claims of reaching heights of over 1000 feet and travelling up to 1 mile. The lanterns dimensions and shape vary depending on the manufacturer but typically are approximately 90 cm high with a diameter of 80 cm. They are made from non-flammable, bio-degradable paper with a fuel cell supported by wire fixed to a wooden ring around the base of the lantern.

Retail outlets in Cornwall stock ‘Chinese Flying Lanterns’ for over the counter purchases, they are also readily available via the internet from several companies and have been advertised in daily national newspapers. Their popularity is on the increase.

Risks associated with Flying Lanterns

‘Chinese Flying Lanterns’ have the potential to set fires should a burning fuel cell come into contact with combustible material such as crops, gorse, grassland and wooden structures. A recent example of this occurred in the West Midlands where it is alleged that use of these lanterns caused a serious fire in a plastics factory.

Considerations when assessing the risk:

- Fuel cells are likely to have glowing embers after the flame has ceased.
- Glowing embers may fall from the fuel cell after flames have almost ceased and continue to fall until completely exhausted.
- The wooden ring at the base of the lantern paper will ignite if exposed to a naked flame.
- Burning fuel may drip or spill from the cell.
- Wind will have a large influence on the distance and direction the lantern will travel.

The level of fire risk will be dependent upon the user compliance with the published and supplied manufacturer instructions.
Guidance for the use of flying lanterns

The following guidance is provided to aid the assessment of risk when using flying lanterns. Users should always follow the manufacturer’s instructions.

General Considerations:

- Do not launch a lantern if any part is damaged.
- Read and follow operating instructions very carefully.
- Ideally a lantern should be launched by two adults. It is not suitable for children under 16 and is not a toy.
- Adults should not launch lanterns whilst under the influence of alcohol or any other substance that could affect their level of responsibility.
- At the launch have a fire extinguisher or water nearby.
- Children and other observers should maintain a safe distance upwind of the launch area.
- Do not smoke whilst handling lanterns.

Launch Conditions and site

- Ensure sufficient clearance to avoid obstacles such as trees, power lines or buildings.
- Do not launch in built up areas.
- Avoid launching near roads, especially major roads or motorways.
- Avoid standing crops, especially in dry conditions.
- Avoid areas that may cause confusion with distress signals.
- If you are near the coast, we recommend that you notify local coast guard or lifeboat services that you will be launching flying lanterns because flying lanterns floating out to sea have sometimes been mistaken for distress signals from vessels in distress.
- Do not launch within 5 miles of any airport (If you intend to use any lantern within a 5 mile radius of an airport, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) should be notified under their procedures for organised firework displays. (Notification System to Airmen or NOTAM).
- Do not launch in wind speeds in excess of 5 mph.
- Check the wind direction prior to any launch.
- Be aware of any other local conditions that could affect the launch or safe landing of a lantern such as thatched buildings, standing crops, dry heathland.
Always inform Cornwall Fire & Rescue Service if you are intending to release lanterns by phoning Fire Control on 01872 320205.

If fire breaks out (either at the launch site or on its landing):

- Call the Fire & Rescue Service using 999 or 112 without delay.
- Only attempt to fight the fire if safe to do so.
- If necessary alert others to the fire.
- Be prepared to direct Cornwall Fire & Rescue Service to the location of any fire.

**Instructions for Use**

(Caution!-Steps may vary, refer to the manufacturers instructions)

- Unpack and assemble the components carefully to avoid damage
- Remove packaging waste from the area
- Use two adults to launch each lantern
- Gently pull the centre of the lantern up and start to inflate it by “dropping” to allow the air pressure to inflate. Take care not to damage the paper.
- Hold the lantern upright and ask the second person to carefully light the fuel cell
- Support the lantern gently as it inflates fully, it will eventually feel lighter and start to rise
- Do not attempt to throw the lantern skyward, allow it to rise with support only
- Do not tether the lantern as this may cause instability which could lead to the lantern igniting

Event organisers (and/or managers of venues) subject to The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 must ensure that a suitable and sufficient risk assessment has been completed prior to allowing the launch of flying lanterns. They are further advised to check with their insurance providers that subsequent use will not adversely affect their insurance arrangements or if additional insurance cover will be required.
Position Statement
In July 2013 The Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) issued a position statement on the subject:

“CFOA does not support the use of these devices and asks members of the public and event organisers to refrain from using them. Whilst these lanterns are undoubtedly a popular and beautiful sight, the potential damage they can cause is significant”.

Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service also does not endorse the use of flying lanterns but have provided this guidance to assist you to safely enjoy their use should you choose to do so.

No liability is accepted for any injury, loss or damage that may arise from their use.

Business Support
Cornwall Fire and Rescue Service in conjunction with our colleagues in Cornwall Council’s Trading Standards team would like retailers and importers in the UK to take the lead and demand that the lanterns they purchase from manufacturers are:

- 100% bio-degradable and wire free
- Provided with a high quality fuel source
- Supplied with comprehensive operating and safety instructions

We would also like to see the information contained in the safety leaflet given prominence on websites, in catalogues and where possible at other points of sale.
Advice and Support

View our Keeping Safe guidance here Cornwall Council - Chinese Lanterns

Advice on your legal responsibilities under the Fire Safety Order
www.cornwall.gov.uk/rro

Fire risk assessment advice and guidance
www.cornwall.gov.uk/fireriskassessment

Email: protection@fire.cornwall.gov.uk

St Austell Community Fire Station
Tel: 01726 223620 (office hours 9am to 5pm)

24hr Fire Safety Advice
Tel: 0800 3581 999