



Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service

Wiltshire and Swindon Fire Authority

Flying Lanterns

Also Known as Chinese Flying Lanterns or Wish Lanterns

Considerations for Safe Use

Traditional flying lanterns have origins that go back thousands of years in both Chinese and Thai celebrations. They are now becoming increasingly popular worldwide as a means of celebrating weddings, birthdays, anniversaries or virtually any other special event. The risk of fire caused by incorrect handling, unspent fuel cells, or other unplanned deviations from the recommended flight or environmental conditions should be fully considered prior to use.

The lanterns are generally made from paper supported by a wire frame that incorporates a holder at the bottom for a solid fuel cell. The paper outer may or may not be fire retardant. Sizes and shapes vary with manufacturing specifications however they are typically 90cm high with a diameter of 80cm approximately. Flying times suggested by manufactures vary from 6-8 minutes and up to 20 minutes with achievable heights claimed to be up to 1 mile.

Flying lanterns should always be provided with full safety instructions; further information should also be available from the supplier or manufacturer through their websites. A list of general instructions is also available at the end of this document.

Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service strongly recommend that guidance provided for safe use and enjoyment is followed at all times. Whilst lighting and launch are largely in the control of the user, the actual flight path and ultimate destination are generally not. There is also no guarantee that the fuel cell will be fully extinguished and cooled when the lantern eventually descends and any subsequent contact with a combustible surface could result in a fire developing.

As well as the general considerations listed in the user instructions, users should also consider the local environment for the launch and intended flight path. The following list is not exhaustive but highlights some areas that should be avoided for fire safety reasons:

- Areas with standing crops
- Buildings with thatched roofs
- Areas of dense woodland
- Areas of heath or bracken, especially in dry conditions

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.

Guidance for the Use of Flying Lanterns

These notes are to aid the assessment of risk associated with the use flying lanterns however **Users should always follow the manufactures instructions.**

General

- Lanterns should be used by responsible adults only
- Adults should not be under the influence of alcohol or any substance that could affect their level of responsibility
- Have water or other extinguishing facility available at the launch site, lanterns or clothing may ignite if the correct launch procedures are not followed
- Keep the launch area clear of combustible materials
- Children and other observers to maintain a safe distance upwind of the launch area
- Two adults are required to correctly launch each lantern
- Do not attempt to launch damaged lanterns, be aware that writing messages on the paper can cause damage
- Do not smoke whilst handling lanterns

Launch Conditions and Area

- Ensure sufficient clearance to avoid obstacles such as trees, power lines or buildings
- Avoid launching near roads, especially major roads or motorways
- Avoid standing crops, especially in dry conditions
- Avoid areas that may allow confusion with distress signals
- Do not launch within 5 miles of any airport
- Do not launch in wind speeds in excess of 5 mph
- Check wind direction before launch
- Be aware of any other local conditions that could affect launch or landing safety such as thatched buildings, standing crops or dry heath land.

Launch Procedure

(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

Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service do not endorse the use of flying lanterns but have provided this guidance to help 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, howsoever caused.

Always follow the manufacturer’s instructions fully.