

Alun Davies AC / AM
Y Gweinidog Cyfoeth Naturiol a Bwyd
Minister for Natural Resources and Food



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-04-385
Ein cyf/Our ref AD-/00827/13
William Powell AM
AM for Mid & West Wales
Chair Petitions committee
Ty Hywel
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

30 June 2013

Dear Bill,

REPORT ON THE IMPACTS OF SKY LANTERNS AND HELIUM BALLOONS

Thank you for your letter dated 12 June asking what actions will now be taken following the publication of the research report on sky lanterns and helium balloons.

The evidence from this report suggests that any impact on the environment and risk of widespread injury or death to livestock is low. Based on these findings it would be difficult to justify a ban on either sky lanterns or helium balloons, as any action taken must be proportionate to the problem. However, I remain concerned about the issue and will continue to work closely with our partners, in particular Keep Wales Tidy, to ensure that impacts of sky lanterns and helium balloons are minimised. My Chief Veterinary Officer Dr Christianne Glossop has previously issued advice to raise awareness of the possible impacts on livestock welfare and farm buildings and will do so again shortly.

I will be writing to local authorities to encourage them to consider the risks from sky lanterns and helium balloons in their areas. The report provides evidence that two Welsh local authorities have already introduced a voluntary ban on the release of sky lanterns on Council-owned land. This has had a positive impact in terms of preventing large-scale releases and raising public awareness locally; I will encourage other local authorities to follow this approach. I will also raise the issue with charitable organisations to ensure that they consider the wider impacts of releasing balloons or sky lanterns at their events.

I understand that the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) advise Fire and Rescue Services to discourage the use of Chinese lanterns by:

- working with their local trading standards offices to control the use and design of these products;
- working with their local police authority to discourage the approval of events licences for events planning to release lanterns;
- working with local events licensors to discourage the use of these lanterns; and
- scoping out the possibility of litigation with interested parties such as the local police and Civil Aviation Authority.

In Wales the CFOA Community Risk Reduction Committee sets the strategic direction on community safety, education and engagement; updates are provided through their meetings on UK wide issues, local risk assessments are identified and community safety strategies are developed.

The Welsh Government notes that the research report highlights risks to aviation as one of the most significant issues posed by sky lanterns and helium balloons. Aviation safety is non-devolved and action to address these risks is a matter for the Department for Transport and the Civil Aviation Authority. The research report also highlights the issue of red sky lanterns causing false alarms to the Coast Guard and, although matters relating to the Coast Guard are non-devolved, my officials have contacted the Civil Contingencies Manager in the Welsh Coast Guard to ensure they are aware of the report.

The Welsh Government acknowledges that provision of appropriate consumer information has an important role to play in enabling members of the public to make informed choices about whether to release sky lanterns and helium balloons. Although there is specific information that should be communicated in relation to release of these objects near airfields, airports and the coast, we believe that it would make sense for this to be considered as part of comprehensive consumer information on these products. Although not a devolved issue, we support the UK Government in taking forward work to ensure that manufacturers place clear warnings on packaging. I will be closely monitoring the progress of the UK Government in working with retailers, manufacturers and others to improve public awareness of how to use these products responsibly. My officials will also be publishing links to guidance on the safe use of sky lanterns on the Welsh Government website.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Yours ever Alun', with a small horizontal line under the name 'Alun'.

Alun Davies AC / AM

Y Gweinidog Cyfoeth Naturiol a Bwyd
Minister for Natural Resources and Food