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**The Rt Hon Owen Paterson MP**  
From the Secretary of State

Thank you for your letter of 17 March requesting a response to your previous correspondence of 23 July 2013 about a petition on Chinese lanterns. I am sorry we have no record of receiving your previous letter but I am happy to provide the latest Government position on this issue.

As you know, over the last few years there have been a number of representations from farming and conservation groups campaigning for a complete ban on the sale and use of sky lanterns on the grounds of animal welfare and unsightly debris/litter. This was in large part the prompt for the study to which your letter refers. The report found that the risks were relatively minor, with highly localised impacts rather than a widespread problem. It concluded that there is some potential for lanterns to create fire risks.

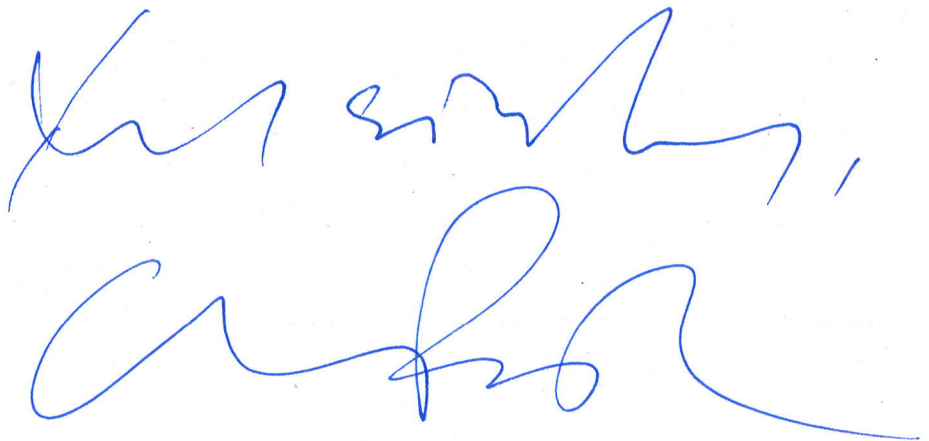
As Alun Michael AC/AM notes in his reply of 15 October 2013, any action by Government must be proportionate to the level of risk and grounded in firm evidence. At present, this is insufficient to justify and support action to ban the use of sky lanterns. Information from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) shows that in the four years from 2010-11 to 2013-14, the number of sky lantern fire incidents reported by fire and rescue authorities has reduced by a half from 200 (2010-11) to 100 in 2013-14. This equates to 0.1% of outdoor fire incidents. Most of these incidents (95%) caused little or no damage.



We know that voluntary actions and initiatives to raise awareness and highlight risks can be effective, and we are working across government and with retailers and the hospitality sector to raise awareness and look for ways to improve standards and safety.

In December, for example, Defra officials met with the British Retail Consortium (BRC), the Association of Convenience Stores, the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG), the British Standards Institute, and retailers of sky lanterns. The main outcome was an agreement that the BRC will develop a new Code of Practice for sky lanterns to address concerns about their safety. The aim is to have an agreed Code of Practice in place by June 2014. This will set out good practice that importers, retailers and manufacturers should aim for when sourcing or selling sky lanterns and the hazardous elements of design they should avoid. Defra has also met with officials from the National Outdoor Events Association, (NOEA), who have offered to lend their weight to the development and take-up of the Code.

We regularly promote the safe use of sky lanterns, especially during key dates in the calendar such as bonfire night. We also commissioned a sky lantern safety infographic for regular use on our social media sites such as Twitter, which currently reaches an audience of over 55,000 followers. Last year, we published a 5-point safety guide on Defra's Facebook site. As the peak season for weddings approaches we will continue to promote these important safety messages. Other organisations such as the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) also publish useful advice and information to promote the safe use of sky lanterns.



**THE RT HON OWEN PATERSON MP**