

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



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref
Ein cyf/Our ref
Mr Gareth Chapman
Chief Executive
Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council
Civic Centre
Castle Street
Merthyr Tydfil CF47 8AN

7 October 2013

Dear Mr Chapman

You may be aware that the Welsh Government and Defra jointly commissioned an independent research project to establish a body of dependable evidence on the impact on livestock, plants and the environment of sky lantern and helium balloon releases. The report was published in May this year and is available on the Welsh Government website:

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/environmentcountryside/epq/cleanneighbour/cnpublications/sky-lanterns-risk-assessment/?lang=en>

The research report concluded that any impact on the environment and risk of widespread injury or death to livestock is low. However the report did find that the fire risk associated with the use of sky lanterns, mainly to agricultural crops, buildings and moorland is significant. I remain concerned about the issue and will continue to work closely with all our partners to ensure that the impacts of sky lanterns and helium balloons are minimised.

The research report highlighted that, across England and Wales, 17 local authorities (including Conwy County Borough Council and Cardiff City Council in Wales) have applied a voluntary ban on the release of helium balloons and sky lanterns from council-owned/controlled land. The evidence presented in the report suggests that where local authority bans are in place, they have served to raise public awareness of the risks associated with such releases. Bans also involve targeting specific stakeholders likely to be involved in the mass release of balloons or lanterns as part of specific events. These typically include charity fundraising groups, community groups and businesses promoting sales or products for special events.

I am writing to all local authorities in Wales to highlight the benefits of introducing a voluntary ban on the release of sky lanterns and helium balloons from council-owned/controlled land. Furthermore I would urge all local authorities in Wales to review their policies in order to discourage the use release of these lanterns and balloons wherever possible, especially in light of the fire risks from sky lanterns, as demonstrated by the recent fire at the plastic recycling plant in Smethwick, West Midlands.

Making consumers aware of the risks associated with sky lanterns and helium balloons appears to be the key to achieving a more responsible approach to their use and, from the

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evidence available, this seems to have been one of the main benefits of the introduction of voluntary bans in some authorities. I encourage all local authorities in Wales to work with their partners to raise awareness of these risks.

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. The Welsh Government 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.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alun Davies', with a horizontal line underneath the name.

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