

Balloon releases are spectacular and are able to fulfil a variety of promotional and fundraising objectives.

Sky lanterns are known by a variety of names including: Chinese lanterns (fàng tiān dēng), Fire lanterns, Thai lanterns, Kong Ming, Khoom Fay, Khom Loi, Wish lantern, Chinese Flying Lanterns, Thai Sky Lanterns, Wedding Lanterns, Flying lanterns, Floating Lanterns, Paper lanterns, Japanese paper lanterns, Sky candles, Glow lantern, Chinese flying glowing lantern and Paper hot air balloons.

They are all small hot air balloons made of a paper-covered wire or bamboo frame, with an opening at the bottom where an open flame heat source is suspended. The Sky lantern floats up into the air and remains airborne for as long as it is filled with hot air. Careful design and construction should ensure that the lanterns remain in the air until the flame is extinguished and once landed, that any impact on animals or the environment is minimised.

In practice Sky lanterns have given rise to a number of safety concerns including:

- Risks to livestock and animal health (including marine animals) causing injury, suffering, and death. This is due to animals eating lantern parts accidentally chopped into animal feed during harvest, or getting caught in wire frames that have landed in fields. Sharp parts they can tear and puncture an animal's throat or stomach causing internal bleeding or death.
- Fire risk and damage to crops and property. Fire services have issued warnings to people over the fire risk following incidents such as the Smethwick recycling plant;
- Impact on the environment, including littering on land and at sea. (The Bamboo in biodegradable lanterns can take decades to degrade.);
- Risks to aviation;
- Risk to coastal rescue services (Maritime and Coastguard Agency have also raised concerns over the similarity of lanterns to distress flares.);
- Risk to consumer safety.

The RSPCA, Marine Conservation Society, Women's Food and Farming Union (WFU), Soil Association and National Farmers Union (NFU) are asking Councils and other land owners to ban lantern releases from their land because of the risks that they pose.

Alternatives to a sky lantern release that event organisers should consider are:

- Stationary candles, nightlights;
- Static lanterns or outdoor lights;
- Plant a tree in memory of a loved one.