



BSA SAFETY MOMENT

THE DANGERS OF SKY LANTERNS

SUMMARY

What lifts off, almost effortlessly, illuminating the nighttime sky? Answer: Sky lanterns. However, the BSA has been tracking their use and regulation for several years, and while sky lanterns look “cool,” they should not be a part of any official Scouting activity.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Sky lanterns (also known as paper, floating, or Chinese lanterns) are basically small, unmanned hot air balloons. They are usually made of a wire or bamboo frame with a paper shell. There is a candle or other fuel source in a holder at the bottom of the lantern. The flame generates enough hot air to lift the lantern high into the sky and adds a warm, inviting glow as it floats through the air. These lanterns can travel up to a mile or more depending upon the local winds and atmospheric conditions.

The challenge with releasing a sky lantern is control. Once released, you can no longer control where it goes, where it comes down, or if something will catch fire as a result. Under the wrong conditions, that “warm, inviting glow” can become a house or forest fire. Outside of Scouting, there have also been reports of livestock dying after eating the lanterns and burns to individuals when the lanterns come down unexpectedly.

Many state and local fire jurisdictions have already banned the use of sky lanterns in their area. As Scouts, we believe in following some basic fire safety principles, one of which warns us that “fires should be attended at all times.”

Remember—what looks “warm and inviting” may not always be safe!

If Scouts and leaders have any questions about how fires should be handled in your area, we suggest contacting the local fire authority when planning an event.

RESOURCES

- *Boy Scout Handbook*, 13th ed., No. 34554
- Sky Lantern Dangers (Health and Safety Alert, October 2012)—www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/alerts/sky-lanterns/
- Firem’n Chit—www.scouting.org/programs/boy-scouts/advancement-and-awards/merit-badges/firem/
- Unit Fireguard Plan Chart—www.scoutstuff.org/chart-unit-fireguard.html#.WmeE-K6nG70