

## **7<sup>th</sup> Annual Lantern Launch(July 14<sup>th</sup>, 2018)**

It is that time of year when we at the Willey's Store begin to plan the annual lantern launch. Every year the event gets bigger and bigger with more people participating around the lake to make for a spectacular and beautiful evening. I also know that every year we get complaints about the environmental hazards, the danger to animals and the chance of catching things on fire. I do my best to answer these questions on a one on one basis but this year we thought it would be a good idea to address these questions early.

### **Are sky lanterns harmful to the environment?**

To be honest the answer is yes, they can be. The recent popularity of sky lanterns lead to a flood of cheap lanterns made with steel and other materials that were harmful to both animals and birds being bought from online sites like amazon and Ebay. This initial flood of lanterns and the eventual backlash, both real and sensational, that followed had many cities and towns restricting their use without fully understanding the issue. We knew that these types of questions would be asked and we did our best to research and find lanterns that were 100% biodegradable and would have a minimal impact on the environment.

### **What are our lanterns made of?**

Our lanterns are made of high quality fire resistant paper, a pre-assembled fuel cell attached by string to a bamboo ring. They are 100% biodegradable and contain no metal. If you come across a lantern with a metal frame it was brought in by a summer guest and not bought from Willey's Store.

The company we use is JustArtifacts based out of Phoenix Arizona. Please feel free to read more about them and the lanterns we use. The link to their website is below:

<https://www.justartifacts.net/precowiskyla.html>

### **Please tell us what the fuel cell is made of?**

The fuel cell is made of brown paper and paraffin that burns up completely and self-extinguishes before the lantern falls back to earth. It does not melt or drip and I have never seen the fuel cell burn through the string that holds it.

### **Can the Paper Catch on fire?**

The paper part of the lantern is fire resistant but will burn if flame is applied directly to it. Once the flame has been removed it will quickly extinguish itself. If the lantern has been handled poorly and any part of the paper is burned it may not launch properly and stay close to the ground as it can't get the lift it needs and can be caught by the owner and extinguished.

### **Are they poisonous to animals?**

No, they are not poisonous to animals. The idea that an animal will eat them is false as animals are smart enough to know that they are eating something other than their regular food. It is possible that a lantern will get mixed in with hay or other cut or ground food sources but will not pose a major threat to the animal.

### **Will Birds fly into them and get caught?**

I suppose it is possible, but since the lanterns are not moving at high speed they should be able to avoid them easily in the air and the size and shape do not look like anything they would attempt to feed on.

### **Well what about getting caught in the string and suffocating?**

Every year I open a lantern and attempt to get my hand or other small object stuck in the string like I have seen on the news and other websites. I have never been able to recreate those scenes as the bamboo ring will break first in order to get the slack necessary to get stuck, and even then the string is so loose that it will slide right off or is very easy to get out of. Conversely the paper and string make very good nesting materials.

### **Can sky lanterns float into space?**

No, they cannot float into space. The average sky lantern floats for about 10 minutes and only travels about 1 to 2 miles high before safely coming back down.

### **Will Sky lanterns explode in the sky?**

Once a lantern takes off into the night there is no need to worry about it exploding or catching fire.

### **Are sky lanterns a fire hazard?**

Sky lanterns are hot air balloons made of paper. You ignite the fuel cell, let the paper balloon part fill up with hot air and then release it into the night. This means that the most dangerous part of a lantern is at the beginning and right after being launched. Wind and improper handling are the usual culprits when something goes wrong.

It is possible that an improperly launched lantern can set things on fire. I have seen lanterns land in trees or skid along the ground but thankfully the only burns I have heard are from people trying to use a lighter to ignite the fuel source and the top or ignition switch becoming hot enough to burn your fingers.

### **Are the lanterns still hot when they hit the ground?**

No, assuming that the lantern was launched properly and reached its maximum height of 2 miles the fuel cell will be completely burned up and since there is no heat to keep the balloon in the air it will begin to cool and gently fall to the ground.

### **What happens when a lantern is inappropriately launched?**

If a lantern fails to launch the people involved will know almost immediately and they can take immediate action to recover the lantern and either attempt a relaunch or let it burn out in a controlled manner.

### **What precautions do we take to prevent a fire hazard?**

First and foremost if the year is dry and there is a burn warning we will cancel the lantern launch. We check with the fire department or the fire marshal a day or so prior to the event to make sure that there is not burn warning. To date, we have been lucky that it has rained either the day of or days prior to the event so that the trees and surrounding areas are not prone to ignition.

Second, we watch for strong winds that might interfere with the lanterns causing them to go sideways faster than they will go up. If the winds are too strong we will cancel the event.

Third, we have been refining our instructions for lighting them to make it easier and safer. Our current method is to use a tiki torch canister set on the ground. You can hold the fuel cell over the flame get it started and move a safe distance away to allow the balloon to fill and then launch.

Fourth we always have volunteer fire department members taking part in the event. For the past two years a friend of mine has come to the event and brought her husband who is a West Rutland volunteer fire department member. As the night progresses, I consult with him to make sure people and objects are safe. I do believe in prior years members of the Greensboro fire department watched the event from the fire house. We will reach out to the Greensboro Fire Department this year to see if we can arrange for a more proactive involvement during the event.

Fifth, we have fire extinguishers available at the Willey's Store tent.

### **What happens to all the lanterns once they fall back to the ground?**

The lanterns are 100% biodegradable and so nature will take its course or there is a 25 cent bounty on any lanterns found and brought back to the store for proper disposal. This bounty applies to any lantern found and it was our hope that some eager young entrepreneurs would go forth and hunt them down and bring them back. The bounty is handled in the same way that bottles are returned for their deposit. Bring them in, a member of my staff will count them and then give you a receipt to bring to the register whether or not they were purchased from Willey's.

## **Conclusion**

I hope that I have answered many of your questions and convinced you that a lot of time and thought has gone into the planning of this event. We do our best to anticipate any possible problem or issue and hope that we can continue this event long into the future and possibly expand on it to make our summers more memorable and fun for everyone. If there are any other questions or concerns that I did not address here I am more than happy to hear them, answer them to the best of my ability or come up with a solution.

Sincerely

Robert W Hurst