Fire Marshal Warns of Dangers Associated with Sky Lanterns

Baton Rouge, LA – Whether it be a wedding, a concert, or ceremonies remembering lost loved ones, there is little doubt as to the growing popularity of Kongming Lanterns, or as they are most commonly known as: sky lanterns. Unfortunately, despite the beautiful glow they emit as they gracefully ascend upward, sky lanterns, which basically operate as miniature hot air balloons, hold horrific potential of great devastation.

Constructed of very thin rice paper or a thin paper membrane, the lanterns, which were first used in 3rd century China, are propelled skyward as an open flamed fuel source heats the air inside, changing its density and making it lighter. Once aloft, they can travel for miles, and because they are guided directionally by the wind, users have no control on where they land—which is why over two (2) dozen states, a number of countries, and many municipalities have either banned them or restricted their use.

A number of laws and regulations have been passed and/or under consideration after a number of high-profile fires:

- Over 800 acres of land in South Carolina was burned in July 2011 after a sky lantern descended in a densely-wooded area near Myrtle Beach. The fire took days to extinguish.
- A 2013 fire inflicted approximately $9,000,000 in damage to a plastics plant in Smethwick, England, where surveillance cameras captured images of the lantern that started the fire.
- In 2014, a number of vegetation fires as well as the continuing drought in California prompted officials to ban the lanterns as a fire hazard.
- On May 2, 2015, a cell phone tower in Gastonia, North Carolina was ignited after a number of sky lanterns were blown into it after being released from an area rock concert. The height of the fire on the tower was higher than the fire department could reach with water.

Ironically, a city in China, Sanya, banned the lanterns because they posed a danger to aircraft.

As a result of the increasing popularity of sky lanterns and the potential increase of destructive fires relating to their use, the National Association of State Fire Marshals passed a resolution in 2013, encouraging a nationwide ban of the lanterns.

The Louisiana State Fire Marshal responded by ordering a ban on the distribution, sale, and use of sky lanterns in the State of Louisiana. Violations of the order can result in criminal and/or civil penalties.

Nam Yuen District, Thailand fire; November 6, 2014 (Photograph courtesy of Google Images inquiry).