

Date: 05/07/2013

William Powell AM

National Assembly for Wales,
Cardiff Bay,
Wales,
CF99 1NA.



KEEP WALES TIDY
33-35 Cathedral Road,
Cardiff
CF11 9HB

Tel: 029 20 726970
Bryony.bromley@keepwalestidy.org
www.keepwalestidy.org

Dear Mr Powell,

Thank you for informing us about the recent report on sky lanterns and helium balloons and for inviting our response.

Keep Wales Tidy was pleased that the Welsh Government and DEFRA acknowledged the potential negative impacts of balloons and lanterns and sought to examine the extent of the problem. From this perspective, we view the National Assembly for Wales' Petitions process as a particularly engaging and practical means to instigate debate. The Eco-Schools' pupils, on whose behalf we submitted the petition, have engaged in our political process and we would advocate this route for others.

The report itself pointed to the risk of fire and risk to aviation and coastal rescue services associated with lanterns. The recent fire at a plastic recycling plant in Smethwick demonstrated the ongoing risk. We would reiterate our concern that, being unregulated, the extent of balloon and lantern releases is unknown. There is also uncertainty as to the extent of livestock and wildlife deaths associated with balloons and lanterns, because of the likely significant under-reporting of deaths and the limited number of post mortems carried out.

We would also like to emphasise our concern that, whilst the majority of the public are aware that throwing litter on the ground is against the law and could result in a fine, there is no such consequence for 'throwing' balloons and lanterns into the air; despite the inevitable litter that will arise. This appears to be a contradiction in the message that both government and ourselves are working so hard to deliver.

We would also make reference to the note about the value of the helium balloon industry being circa £150m in the UK and the potential loss of economic activity linked to a change in legislation. It should be stressed that efforts have been made during current campaigning to work with the balloon industry to promote more environmentally friendly uses of balloons, such as sculptures, mitigating any potential loss of income.

www.keepwalestidy.org www.cadwchgymrundaclus.org

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In light of the above, Keep Wales Tidy and our partners remain concerned about the negative impacts of balloons and lanterns. However, in the absence of any legislative change, we support voluntary action and we continue to invite schools and other organisations to pledge not to partake in releases (via our website). A number of local authorities across the UK have banned releases from their property and we understand that the Minister for Natural Resources and Food, Alun Davies, is planning to urge all Welsh local authorities to do so. Keep Wales Tidy would wholly support such action and we would urge that charities and businesses are also included in such an appeal.

Yours sincerely,

Bryony Bromley

(Keep Wales Tidy)

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