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Our ref: DWO371992/JS

19 March 2015

Dear Ms Gabriel,

Thank you for your letter of 2 March to the Secretary of State about sky lanterns. I have been asked to reply.

Sky lanterns are a long-running issue and we are aware that there have been concerns about their safety. However it is worth noting that an independent study we published in 2013 about sky lantern safety found that the risks to animals or damage to the environment by sky lanterns were relatively minor, with impacts being highly localised rather than a widespread problem. While the study concluded that there was potential for sky lanterns to pose a risk to fire safety, figures released last year by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) suggest that only 0.1% of all outdoor fires were sky lantern related, most of which caused little or no damage.

You will appreciate that any action we take must be proportionate to the level of risk. Naturally, we do not want to stop enjoyment of celebrations, but we do want to ensure that people think twice about the impact of a lantern after it leaves their hands, and the potential consequences of where it lands. We know that voluntary actions and initiatives to raise awareness of risks can be effective. We have therefore been exploring and taking forward a package of measures to address this issue and, within that context, working with the DCLG on powers available at a local level to address the matter.

For example, last year, the Trading Standards Institute (TSI) published an industry Code of Practice for sky lanterns. The Code was compiled by industry with input from importers, distributors and trading standards officers, and Government support from Defra, DCLG and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). The Code, which is voluntary, aims to provide guidance for manufacturers, importers, distributors and retailers and will help ensure that, in future, sky lanterns are manufactured to be safe, are biodegradable and are sold responsibly. It will also assist market surveillance authorities in recognising the safety checks that need to be made and the type of warnings and instructions that need to accompany sky lanterns to help ensure their responsible sale and safe use.

We would expect the industry Code of Practice to lead to greater awareness of the potential risks and to more care being taken in the manufacture, sale and use of sky lanterns. The Code is available on the TSI website at:



<http://www.tradingstandards.gov.uk/policy/skylanterns.cfm>.

Over the last few years, at those times of the year when sky lanterns are more likely to be used, we have publicised the risks they pose. People are now becoming more aware of the risks: event organisers have prohibited their use, there has been a fall in sales and a number of larger retailers no longer sell them. Furthermore, while some local authorities have already used existing powers to ban or regulate their use on council-owned land, the introduction of the DCLG's new model byelaw provision has made this easier by allowing councils to do this through a byelaw. Any council wishing to do so can be reasonably confident of DCLG approval unless there are some specific local circumstances which suggest this would be inappropriate.

In addition to these measures, BIS, (working through local Trading Standards departments) has successfully used the General Product Safety Regulations 2005, to remove certain types of sky lanterns from the UK market where its poor product quality has raised concerns over fire or health risks to the consumer.

I hope that this information is useful to you.

Yours sincerely,



Josh Sweet
Defra - Customer Contact Unit

