

Up, Up, and Away

Many of us have been to events where sky lanterns or balloons were released into the air. Over the years these activities have become a concern due to the lack of control of where the balloons or sky lanterns fall. Because of the concerns the state has passed legislation that limits the use of sky lanterns and balloon releases. The Tennessee State Fire Marshal's Office reminds people that sky lanterns - unmanned airborne paper lanterns fueled by flame, usually a candle - can only be operated by licensed fireworks professionals. There are several concerns associated with the sky lanterns, such as; the ignition of combustible materials (grass, trees, rooftops, or other material), livestock hazards when animals consume the remains of the lanterns and candles, and dry weather conditions. Sky lanterns found in the possession of someone who does not have a professional license issued by the State can be confiscated and destroyed.

Similar concerns for the livestock hazard and littering contribute to the state regulations on balloons being released. Tennessee Code 68-101-108 limits the release of balloons to no more than twenty five (25) if the balloons are non-biodegradable material, or if they are biodegradable material but requires more than several minutes of contact with air or water to degrade, and filled with helium or other substance that causes the balloons to rise or float in the atmosphere. A violation of the statute is subject to a fine of \$250. The statute further explains that each balloon released in excess of the limit (25), in a day, constitutes a separate violation. The statute does not apply to weather balloons used for the purpose of carrying scientific instruments during the performance of an experiment or testing procedure.

Many events release balloons as memorials, public awareness, celebrations, and other occasions. Please be mindful of the state statute and limit the balloons to twenty-five (25). Articles and contents do not constitute legal advice. Questions about legal procedures and issues should be directed to a licensed attorney. Any questions regarding police operations may be directed to me at (931) 455-0530 or pblackwell@tullahomtn.gov.