

## S A F E T Y N O T E S

July, 2015

### What's Wrong With This Picture?



Chinese sky lanterns, miniature hot-air balloons constructed of rice paper on a bamboo or wire frame and fueled by an open flame, have become increasingly popular at weddings, memorial services and festivals in recent years.

**Sky lanterns are illegal in Spokane City and County at any time and for any occasion.** Once sky lanterns are launched, they cannot be controlled. Persons who light and launch these open-flame lanterns will be fined and held responsible for firefighting costs as well as property damage.

Manufactured sky lanterns were reportedly first created in the Chinese city of Sanya, which has since banned them because they have caused delays and safety concerns from flights at a nearby airport. They are currently outlawed in about 25 states, many foreign countries, and in any jurisdiction that abides by the International Fire Code (Section 305.1) or the National Fire Protection Association.

A recent release of sky lanterns near the Idaho state line underscores that fire hazards can easily cross state boundaries and travel through jurisdictions that outlaw their use. A huge variety of inexpensive sky lanterns are readily available through the internet. Some people even make their own.

During the first week of May dozens of sky lanterns launched at the Carolina Speedway in North Carolina blew into a cell phone tower. The resulting fire was dramatic and significantly challenged the capacity of the local fire department. In 2011, more than 800 acres burned in Myrtle Beach, SC when a lantern landed on dry brush. Inexpensive does not mean “cheap” when the increased fire risk during this hot and dry summer is placed in the equation!

## RECREATIONAL FIRES RESTRICTED

With our especially hot and dry summer, the City of Spokane and Spokane County fire authorities have issued restrictions on outdoor recreational fires effective June 17 and continuing until further notice.



- In-ground campfires, fire bowls and fire pits are not allowed.
- Outdoor fireplaces or patio warmers are allowed only if they are equipped with a spark arrestor and a chimney.
- Outdoor barbecues are permitted as long as a responsible adult is in attendance at all times and approved fire extinguishing equipment (e.g. garden hose, dirt, shovel, 4-A fire extinguisher) is at hand and ready for use.
- Smoke from outdoor barbecues or fireplaces is not allowed to create a health hazard or nuisance for neighbors.
- The use of barbecues and other recreational fire equipment may be further restricted according to lease agreements between landlords and tenants.

## POTTING SOIL vs. ASHTRAYS

Another potted plant became the ignition site for a significant fire in a Spokane high rise apartment. Many people are still unaware that the “dirt” used for outdoor plants is generally potting soil containing organic material and it can burn. If residents smoke, inside or outside their apartment, they risk starting a fire every time they utilize a planter as an ashtray. While unattended cooking is the #1 cause of home fires in the United States, careless smoking remains the #1 cause of fire death.

Fortunately, the recent fire on a balcony happened during daylight hours and did not result in a full catastrophe. And it is a wakeup call to all property managers and tenants:

- Does everyone know the fire escape plan?
- When can tenants shelter in place and when must they move immediately to their outside meeting place?
- What are the fire preparedness responsibilities of building owners and managers?
- What are the fire response requirements for tenants?
- How many tenants have renter’s insurance?

If you would like additional information on fire escape planning, please contact Spokane Fire Department at 509.625.7058.

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You can sign up for this monthly newsletter, ask a fire-related question or suggest a specific safety topic by contacting Jan Doherty at [jdoherty@spokanefire.org](mailto:jdoherty@spokanefire.org) or by calling 509.625.7058.



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