

Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service Fire Safety Messages to Area Boards February 2012

House fire started by Chinese lantern

Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service is again warning people about the dangers of Chinese lanterns, after a fire in Swindon on Monday night (30 January).

Chinese lanterns, also known as wish or flying lanterns, have become increasingly popular worldwide as a means of celebrating special occasions – however, they carry a significant risk of fire or injury if not used wisely.

The lanterns are generally made from paper, supported by a wire frame that incorporates a holder at the base for a solid fuel heat source.

Crews from Swindon and Stratton fire stations were called to a property in Bright Street, Gorse Hill at 8.13pm on Monday after fire was reported in the guttering. It is believed the fire was started by a Chinese lantern, which had landed on the roof and ignited debris from birds' nests.

Group Manager Alan Harper said: "The problem with Chinese lanterns is that you can't control the actual direction they take or where they will land – in addition, there is no guarantee that the fuel source will be fully extinguished and cooled when the lantern eventually descends, and that presents a fire hazard. Chinese lanterns are very attractive when flying, but we would urge people to think twice before lighting them in residential areas – there is a real risk."

Locations that should be considered unsuitable for flying lanterns include areas with standing crops, anywhere near buildings with thatched roofs, areas of dense woodland and areas of heath or bracken, especially in dry conditions. Consideration should also be given to the proximity to major roads or airfields.

An advice sheet on the use of Chinese Flying Lanterns is available at www.wiltshire.gov.uk

Service warning on electrical fire safety

Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service is supporting the national Fire Kills campaign and the Electrical Safety Council by warning people about the risks of using electrical equipment in the home.

New national statistics have been released which show that half of all accidental house fires in 2010/11 were caused by faulty or misused electrical equipment.

From faulty fridges and abandoned irons to dodgy plugs and wiring, electrical equipment can be an unnoticed fire hazard in the home – and, with the recent cold weather, many sockets could still be overloaded with space heaters and electric blankets.

In 2010/11, there were 234 fires in Wiltshire that were caused by faulty or misused electrical products – one such fire, which started in a two-bar electric heater, led to the death of a man.

Group Manager Perry Payne, from the community safety department, said: “Electrical equipment is a vital part of all our lives, from essentials like heating and lights to luxuries like entertainment systems and smaller things like hair styling tongs etc. Half of all accidental fires begin with an electrical appliance, so it’s really important to make sure that your electrics are in good working order. If electrical equipment is properly used, properly fused, properly wired and properly maintained then it shouldn’t present a problem.”

He added: “Most electrical fires start in the kitchen, so be extra careful with cooking equipment. Fire in the home can be devastating, but most blazes are preventable. By following some simple steps, you can help keep you and your loved ones safe.”

Safety tips include:

- Don’t overload plug sockets.
- Regularly check for worn or frayed wires.
- Unplug appliances when not in use.
- Keep appliances clean and in good working order.
- Consider using an RCD – Residual Current Device - which works like a circuit breaker to protect against electric shocks and reduces the risk of electrical fires.

In addition, the Electrical Safety Council advises that heaters should be kept clear from curtains and furniture and should never be used for drying clothes, while your electric blanket should be unplugged before you go to bed, unless it has a thermostat for safe all-night use – and check it regularly for signs of wear.

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