OMAHA, Neb. — Eppley Airfield officials are among those concerned about flying, lit lanterns being used as entertainment this holiday weekend.

The lanterns are available for sale to light and let go. Comparable to a miniature hot air balloon, the devices rise and float away. While pretty to many, they are bad news for airplanes and pilots.

"The lanterns are a concern to us here at the airport primarily because when they land on runways, taxiways or ramps they do present debris for us," said Tim Schmitt, Operations Manager at Omaha’s Eppley Airfield. "It is the type of debris that can be ingested by an aircraft engine."

Schmitt says the lanterns are presenting a problem that’s getting worse.

"The last two years we’ve seen this on the airfield," said Schmitt. "Last year was probably our worst year."

It’s not clear if wind or the lanterns’ popularity are adding to the problem, but airport crews are spending a lot of time clearing the remnants away.

"Last year on the fourth of July we picked up over 100 of these lanterns on the airfield," said Schmitt.
There are warnings on some of the lantern packages as well as online to not use them with excessive wind or within five miles of an airport. That distance stretches to 50th and Ames, to Interstate 80, to Iowa Western Community College, and to Crescent, Iowa.

Schmitt doesn’t want anyone to stop having fun, but he does hope people think about what could happen.

"What we do ask the public to consider is the use of the lanterns in the vicinity of the airport and everything to help us prevent this hazard," said Schmitt.

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