



Risk Management Considerations for Inflatable Devices

What was supposed to be a fun treat at a birthday party turned into a nightmare when the bouncy castle that was rented for the day went flying into the air, kids inside and landed on a roof some distance away. The castle was not anchored properly and got picked up by high winds. At another party an inflatable device was overloaded with children and collapsed, spilling the kids out onto the concrete sidewalk. In both these cases inexcusable negligence was responsible for accidents that caused injuries to young children. Keep in mind your responsibilities to users safety when renting or buying any inflatable device as it could save someone's life.

Permits

You should be aware of the required permits and licensing when renting or operating an inflatable device. If you are operating the device in Ontario, you need to follow the procedure set out by the Technical Standards & Safety Authority (TSSA), which can be found at www.tssa.org. This procedure requires that you:

1. Obtain an operating license.
2. Submit a technical dossier.
3. Get your application reviewed by TSSA.
4. Apply for a permit.

5. Get the device inspected.
6. Have a device permit and metal device plate with a unique AD number assigned to your inflatable.

These steps take time, so plan well in advance. Each inflatable requires a separate inspection and permit; you cannot get a blanket permit. If the device is already registered and you are a new owner, you need to go through a change of ownership process. The change of ownership process can also be found at www.tssa.org. Inflatables must also be certified.

Renting an Inflatable

1. Do your research before renting any inflatable device. Does the company have a good reputation? Have they been involved in any claims? If so, were they accidental or preventable?
2. Choose a company that sets up the device rather than one where you set it up yourself. Trained professionals should always be responsible for assembly for the sake of safety.
3. The company should also provide an operator where mandatory. Operators are mandatory for devices that exceed certain heights. If an operator is not provided, the company should give you enough instruction to do it safely, including how to properly deal with emergency situations.

4. Carefully inspect the device before set up. Look for tears, rips or holes to make sure that it is safe for use.
5. The company also needs to have adequate liability insurance that names your entity as an additional insured. Obtain a copy of their policy.

Set-Up and Supervision

1. Set the device on firm, level ground with at least a foot of clearance around the perimeter.
2. Never inflate near electrical lines.
3. The opening of the device should be clear and free of debris and face a wide open area.
4. Landing mats should be placed around the edges to protect anyone who may fall out.
5. Never place the device near water.
6. The device should be securely anchored to the ground using approved stakes or ropes only. Never anchor a device to a mobile structure such as a car.
7. Any stakes used in the ground should be properly covered or marked to prevent people from tripping.
8. Always plug the blower motor into an appropriate receptacle and have a back-up generator to prevent the device from deflating during use.
9. Always follow manufacturer recommendations for set up.
10. Follow TSSA requirements.

Proper supervision is just as important as proper assembly. A study conducted in 2009 cited that 43% of all inflatable-related injuries occurred when there was no adult supervision (Avoian et. al., 2009).

Supervision is needed to make sure that all users are playing safely and obeying the rules of the inflatable. Supervisors should be 18 or older and have proper training. They should know the rules of the device as well as the occupancy limit and be able to confidently enforce both. They should also have basic first aid training in the event of an emergency.

Put a procedure in place for emergencies such as injuries or device deflation so the supervisors are able to deal with any situation that may arise. The number of supervisors needed may be based on device height, type and number of people, so be sure to know the specifics for your area. Lay out ground rules for people to follow when using the

inflatable device so everyone stays safe. Post rules near the device area and be sure people understand them. It is not a bad idea to ask users to sign a Release of Liability and Assumption of Risk waiver stating that they:

1. Understand and will abide by all rules.
2. Comprehend the risks and dangers that exist and assume all responsibility for said risks.

Waivers must be signed by an adult if the participant is a minor.

Rules

The rules for your inflatable device should include but not be limited to:

- The device must be supervised at all times. No person is allowed to use the device if an adult supervisor is not present.
- No sharp objects.
- No silly string.
- No flips, somersaults or horseplay allowed.
- No shoes, glasses or jewelry.
- Children 3 and under may not bounce with children older than 3.
- Infants under the age of 1 are not allowed on the device.
- People with conditions that them to injury are not allowed in the device at any time. This includes pregnant woman, infants, and people with head, neck and back injuries and other disabilities.
- No bouncing allowed near the entrance.
- No bouncing or stepping on the safety netting.
- All persons must stay off the device while it is being inflated and deflated.
- The device is not to be operated in extreme weather conditions such as snow, hail, rain or high winds.
- In emergency situations such as injury or deflation, all persons must exit the device immediately.
- Safety capacity limits are not to be exceeded under any circumstance.
- Maximum weight of users is 170lbs (different if stated by manufacturer). No one exceeding this limit is permitted to use the device.

- No animals allowed in the device.
- Anyone who does not obey the rules will be removed from the device immediately and permanently.
- Blowers should only be operated by adults.
- No food or drinks allowed.

If the inflatable has a slide on it, additional rules should be observed:

- No climbing up the slide.
- Always slide feet first.
- No sliding on stomach.
- One person on the ladder and slide at a time.
- No horseplay.
- Wait until the slide landing area is clear before proceeding.

The most common cause of injury is collision between two people in the device. In the study mentioned above, 53% of injuries caused by collisions occurred when different age groups were using the device at the same time (Avoian et. al., 2009). To avoid injuries, separate children by age and have set times when each age group can use the device.

Reporting Procedure

Have a reporting procedure in place that allows incidents to be dealt with quickly and efficiently. The procedure should outline what types of episodes need to be reported and who they get reported to. The procedure should apply to all manner of events and not be limited to injuries. Having a proper procedure will make sure that all incidents are taken care of and no details are missed.