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California State University Risk Management Authority

Bounce House and Inflatable Play Equipment Safety

Inflatable bounce houses can be safe, fun entertainment when used properly. As with any play equipment, there are many risks involved. In a report from the *Journal of Pediatrics*, researchers state that on average, 31 persons a day are treated in US emergency rooms for injuries related to inflatable bounce houses.

What follows is a series of best practices that should be considered when using a bounce house and inflatable play equipment.

Renting Bounce Houses and Inflatable Play Equipment

1. Establish a system which uses appropriate terms and conditions to transfer risk to the rental agency (including naming your organization as an additional insured).
2. Ensure that the rental agency's insurance limits comply with CSU insurance requirements in contracts/agreements.
3. Determine the primary age group that will be using the bounce house and inflatable play equipment. Inflatable equipment designed for adults will have different standards than equipment designed for children.
4. Obtain written and verbal instructions for operating the equipment from the rental company or product distributor.
5. Ask the rental company for documented operating instructions, engineering profile and safety rules prior to signing a rental contract.
6. Evaluate all equipment for quality, condition and sanitation.
7. Purchasing a bounce house and other inflatable play equipment for permanent use is not recommended.

Location

1. The rental company must set up the inflatable and related equipment. Do not reallocate the equipment after installation.
2. Inflatable play equipment must be set on a flat surface. Do not set up equipment on uneven surfaces, wet surfaces, or surfaces with debris. If necessary, use a protective tarp to cover the surface underneath the inflatable.
3. If the inflatable equipment will be set on a hard surface, place safety mats around the entrance/exit. Mats should be placed tightly together and not be torn, in order to prevent trips or ankle sprains.
4. Identify and mark any gas, water/lawn sprinklers, fire sprinklers, power lines or other equipment that may interfere with installation. Ensure that any object capable of puncturing the inflatable is not located within 20 feet.
5. Verify that the rental company has properly weighted down the inflatable (e.g. with sandbags) or staked down prior to use.

6. If the inflatable is set up indoors:
    a. Only set up in rooms where the ceiling is at least 6 feet above the highest point of the equipment.
    b. Place the inflatable at least 10 feet (or per manufactures recommended distance) away from walls.
    c. Ensure the equipment does not block exits, lighting, fire sprinklers, fire extinguishers or other life-safety features of the building.

Suggested Rules

1. Obey all manufactures safety guidelines.
2. Post all safety rules. The attendant should make all riders, parents and guardians aware of rules posted on the inflatable.
3. Supervision by an adult is required at all times. Never leave the inflatable play equipment unattended.
4. The safest way to use a bounce house and inflatable play equipment is to have only one person on it at a time. If more than one person will be on the equipment at the same time:
    a. Be aware of the occupancy limit (the manufacturer or rental agency should provide this information) and limit the number of persons allowed on/in the equipment accordingly.
    b. Do not allow children in the bounce house whose heights and weights greatly differ. Ensure that children inside the bounce house are similar in age, height and weight.
    c. Limit bounce sessions to 15 minute (or less).
    d. If adults use the equipment:
        i. Attendant must verify (through the manufacture or rental agency) that adults are allowed to use the equipment.
        ii. Adjust occupancy limit accordingly for adults (per manufactures guidelines).
        iii. Adult use of equipment must be at separate times from children. Adults are not allowed to use inflatable play equipment the same time as children.
5. Persons must remove any accessories (jewelry, glasses, items in pockets, etc.) and shoes before they are allowed to enter or use the inflatable equipment. No food, drinks, gum, pets, silly string, or confetti is allowed in/on the inflatable.
6. Do not allow rough housing and do not allow any gymnastics such as somersaults, back-flips, etc. Do not allow persons to rock the inflatable from side to side, as this may cause tipping and injuries.
7. Do not allow persons to play or linger in front of entrances/exits or to climb up exterior walls.
8. Do not allow anyone to use the inflatable when wet.
9. Keep persons away from blower at all times.
10. Inflatables should not be used during high winds or inclement weather.

11. Ensure that the equipment is fully inflated at all times.
12. Regularly inspect for holes and areas of sagging. Ensure that no part of the stitching is undone and that there are no rips or tears.
13. In the event that play equipment begins unexpectedly deflating during use:
    a. Immediately evacuate persons in an orderly fashion one at a time.
    b. Turn off and unplug the blower.
    c. Close the attractions and keep users away from the equipment.

For more information about on this topic, please contact Alliant Loss Control Services at (949) 260-5042 or via e-mail at RiskControl@alliant.com.

This Alliant Risk Control Services fact sheet is not intended to be exhaustive. The discussion and best practices suggested herein should not be regarded as legal advice. Readers should pursue legal counsel or contact their insurance providers to gain more exhaustive advice.