

know risk

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Jumping Castles (indoor & outdoor use)

Inflatable structures such as Jumping (Bouncy) Castles are a popular inclusion in Indoor Play centres and outdoor events such as fetes, carnivals and the like and come in an ever expanding variety of forms. Whatever form the inflatables take, there are risks, hazards and measures that need to be considered for their maintenance and safety when used.

The following risks and hazards are common in the use of inflatable jumping (bouncy) castles and other inflatable play equipment.

Hazards/Risks

- Lack of Supervision
- Number of children on jumping castle at one time (overcrowding)
- Physical injury to children – sprains/strains, bruises, damage to teeth, broken bones etc
- Injury to users caused by fighting/inappropriate and boisterous behaviour
- Not restricting users to specific age groups (e.g. ages 1 – 3, 4 – 6, 7 – 10)
- Injury to users caused by wearing inappropriate clothes and shoes (buckles, jewellery etc)
- Falls from the structure
- Suffocation & entrapment
- Inadequate matting outside the equipment
- Inefficient clearance around jumping castle
- Location of equipment
- Eating, drinking or chewing gum
- Tripping (particularly over anchorages)
- Poorly anchored equipment
- Instability and blowing away in windy conditions
- Unsafe equipment due to poor maintenance
- Windows tearing or detaching
- Failure or loss of power to the fan/blower
- Disconnection of the blower
- Litter blocking the air intake and/or vents
- Situations caused by loss of pressure as a result of failure of the fabric zips and seams

- Access to dangerous (parts of) machinery (e.g. inadequately protected, or unguarded, blower units)
- Electrical hazards (e.g. shock or burns), if powered in this manner
- Inadequate means of escape in case of fire.

Maintaining a safe environment

It is the requirement of the owner/operator of the Jumping (bouncy) Castle to:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of supervision and other preventive measures to ensure a safe environment for children
2. Have a procedure to identify, assess and manage any hazards associated with ensuring a safe environment for children; and
3. Maintain a hazard identification and management checklist and complete this daily.

Daily checks

Checks should be carried out before the first use each day using advice provided by the manufacturer in the operations manual. Items on the checklist should include checking that:

- The site remains suitable, with crowd control measures in place if appropriate
- Anchorages are intact, and ropes not worn or chafed
- Anchor system secures the inflatable equipment to the ground
- There are no significant holes or rips in the fabric or seams
- The correct blower specified for the equipment is being used and the air pressure is sufficient to give a reliable and firm footing
- There are no exposed electrical contacts, there is no wear on electric cables, and plugs, sockets and switches are not damaged
- If an internal combustion engine is used, that the fuel cap is placed firmly on the fuel tank and any reserve fuel tank remains in a safe position

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- Bolts and screws of the blower are properly secured and that robust guards are secured over the air inlet and outlet
- The blower/inflation tube connection is in good condition and is firmly fixed to the blower
- The blower is positioned correctly, adequately protected or guarded and is not causing a tripping hazard
- The immediate vicinity of the castle should also be checked for safety e.g. broken glass.

The inflatable equipment should not be used by the public until any defects identified in the daily check have been rectified.

Annual inspection

Each inflatable should be thoroughly inspected at least annually! Annual inspections need to include checks of the following (annual inspections need to include any part of the inflatable and its ancillary equipment which may affect the safe operation of the equipment):

- Previous inspection reports and certificates where appropriate
- Provision of suitable guards at the air inlet and outlet of the blower
- Condition of blower impeller and fan casing
- Condition of blower electrical wiring
- Condition of all electrical installations
- Anchorage system for wear, rips or chafing
- Type and number etc. of ground anchors or ballast for conformity with design specification
- Structure for wear or rips in the fabric
- Walls and towers (when fitted) are firm and upright
- Pressure is sufficient in the bouncing area and at the step/front apron to give a reliable and firm footing
- Internal ties for wear and tear, particularly at loose or exposed ends
- Bed seams, wall-to-bed seams and wall-to-tower connections
- If used on a fixed site, the location.

Inspection of some of these features may need to be done inside the equipment. The above list is not exhaustive.

Other factors that should be considered

The use of any inflatable equipment should be according to the manufacturer's guidelines with due consideration being given to the following:

- Weather conditions – Jumping castles should not be used when winds or gusts are in excess of the maximum safe wind speed specified by the manufacturer
- If the ground surface is abrasive, oily or dirty, a ground sheet should be used to prevent wear and tear of the base material
- The site (for outdoor use) is away from trees, fences, walls and overhead cables
- The surface to be used is free from rocks and any sharp objects
- If it likely that crowds of people will be present, then adequate crowd control measures around the equipment will be necessary
- Electrical supply – ensure that the supply is connected into an RCD (Residual current device – circuit breaker)
- Ensure the equipment is not overloaded with users
- Larger more boisterous users should be separated from smaller ones
- The number of users at any one time should be limited to allow each user enough room to play safely. Numbers should be considered in any risk assessment
- How often the play equipment cleaned and sterilised
- Ensuring that users remove footwear (except socks) and any other hard, sharp or dangerous objects e.g. buckles, purses & badges. Glasses are best removed
- Not allowing users to obstruct the exit/entrance points
- Not allowing users to climb or hang on the walls
- Not allowing users who do not conform to height restrictions to use the equipment
- The measures to be taken in the event of power failure
- Procedures for reporting accidents, defects or breakdowns
- Keep users off equipment when it is being inflated or deflated
- Prohibiting somersaults and rough play

Training

The controller should ensure that all operators receive effective training in the working of inflatable equipment including:

- The method of operating the equipment
- Safe entry/exit for users
- Safe methods of assembly/dismantling, where applicable
- How to make a daily check
- Safe anchoring of the inflatable
- Crowd control measures, and barriers
- Measures to be taken in the event of power failure
- Procedures for reporting accidents, defects or breakdowns

This material is for information purposes only. It is not intended to give specific legal or risk management advice nor are any suggestions, checklists or action plans intended to include or address all possible risk management exposures or solutions.