

Guidance Note – Enforcement expectations for Inflatables

Following the tragic fatality involving a child and an inflatable amusement device in Norfolk on Sunday 1st July 2018, and a further incident on an inflatable slide at Woking on 3rd November, where ten children were injured and taken to hospital, the HSE has published revised guidance for industry stakeholders and operators of inflatable equipment. The revised inflatables guidance can be found here:

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/entertainment/fairgrounds/inflatables.htm>

The availability of clear guidance/standards and the now widely known potential for inflatable play equipment injury should mean that enforcement officers who find operators of inflatable play equipment not meeting the available standards/guidance, and putting children at risk, are expected to take strong enforcement action.

Example initial enforcement expectations (IEE) for Inflatables (Bouncy castles, slides etc.) include:

Inflatables not properly secured (e.g. not all tie-down points used, inadequate ballast, tie down points damaged and/or not in use)

When using the inflatable outside, all the anchor points must be used, with metal ground stakes at least 380 mm long and 16 mm wide, with a rounded top. They should have a welded metal 'O' or 'D' ring fitted to the end. All inflatables must have at least 6 anchor points. The operator manual will tell you how many there should be, and you should check to ensure they are all still in place and have not been removed. The ropes used to secure the inflatable should be in good condition and not stretched, frayed or rotten. Improvised tow ropes, e.g. bungee cord are never acceptable.

If ground stakes cannot be used because of the surface (e.g. tarmac) then use ballast weighing at least 163 kg with suitable fixings to attach the guy ropes. The inflatable should be tightly secured to the ground so that the wind cannot get under it and lift it up.

IEE – Prohibition Notice and formal letter. If the matter is rectified immediately a formal letter should still be sent.

No means of measuring wind speed available (anemometer)

All inflatable operators should have available an anemometer for measuring wind conditions. Measurements should be taken at regular intervals and recorded. It is not acceptable to use phone based weather apps to measure wind conditions, as localised conditions can vary significantly. No inflatable should be used in winds above 24 mph (38 kmph), which is Force 5 on the Beaufort Scale (small trees in leaf begin to sway), although some devices may have a lower maximum wind speed for operation. The maximum wind speed for the inflatable device should be confirmed in the operations manual.

IEE – Prohibition Notice and formal letter. If the matter is rectified immediately a formal letter should still be sent.

Incorrect blower specification, including output.

The correct blower should be being used to inflate the device (the blower specification, including output, will be given in the operating manual). The blower should be well maintained, and a visual check should be undertaken to ensure that there are no obvious signs of over-tension or sagging of the structure. The manufacturers operating manual should also specify the time it should take for the device to inflate fully.

The use of a blower with either the incorrect output, or one that is poorly maintained can cause an issue with the stability and integrity of the inflatable device giving rise to a risk of serious personal injury.

IEE – Prohibition Notice and formal letter. If the matter is rectified immediately a formal letter should still be sent.

Electrical equipment including blowers in poor condition

Consider risk of mis-operation and electric shock, especially if signs of damaged housing etc in potentially wet conditions.

IEE - Prohibition Notice and/or formal letter

Initial test and in-service inspection

The inflatable device should have been subjected to an initial test to confirm compliance with the British Standard. It should also be subject to an annual in-service inspection by a competent person. The HSE support two inspection regimes run by ADiPs and PIPA, although other competent inspection bodies may be able to carry out this work.

IEE - If there are obvious defects with the device, which involves (or will involve) a risk of serious personal injury then a Prohibition Notice should be served. If no initial test and/or in-service inspection undertaken, but the device does not pose an immediate risk an Improvement Notice should be served requiring the necessary work to be undertaken.

Safe use, supervision and monitoring

There should be constant supervision by at least one suitably trained person.

Operating instructions must be supplied and should include reference to the following matters:

- The number of users on the inflatable at the same time
- The provision of suitable safety matting at the entrance to the device
- That users should not wear shoes or glasses, and should empty their pockets of all sharp or dangerous items
- Anyone obviously intoxicated should not be allowed on
- Don't allow users to climb or hang on the walls
- The need to undertake regular checks that anchor points are still secure
- When operating the inflatable outside, the use of an anemometer to measure wind conditions at regular intervals, and visually check for changes in wind direction (such as looking at how the trees are swaying).

Operators should be able to demonstrate a practical appreciation and understanding of the risk associated with the operation of their device, that follows the information set out within the operating manual and HSE guidance.

IEE – If the inflatable device is being operated in such a manner that it involves (or will involve) a risk of serious personal injury then a Prohibition Notice should be served.