

Bounce House Safety

Contributed by Cutting Edge Creations
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Bounce House Safety: the Bottom Line Your Bounce House, Slide, or Jumper Manufactured Safe? Owners of inflatable amusement rental businesses have many choices to make when purchasing a new inflatable. Price usually tops the list, along with design and durability. But how often are purchase decisions truly affected by safety considerations? With insurance rates going through the roof and the proliferation of new backyard rental businesses, taking a close look at safety could provide both a competitive edge and lower insurance premiums. Here are several key safety elements that should be considered for every inflatable before making a purchase decision.

Government Regulations Each state has its own rules and regulations regarding the use of inflatables. At the very basic level, ask your manufacturer if their inflatables meet or exceed the minimum standards for your state. These typically include requiring permanent signage built into the inflatable, and regulations concerning wind anchorage and combustibility. New Jersey has come down hardest with regulations, so it might be a good idea to make sure your inflatables meet the New Jersey standards. You never know if your state will be the next to adopt them.

Vinyl Material Lead in paints and vinyl is a huge concern at the moment, with large and very public product recalls for children's products. Vinyl used in most inflatable amusement rides contains lead as part of the PVC manufacturing process. "Dust" can form on these surfaces as the vinyl degrades, becoming an ingestible lead-poisoning hazard. The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) is investigating lead-based hazards in the home, such as with low-cost stabilizers used in vinyl mini blinds. It is vital to ensure that no lead-based paints are used on your inflatables. This is a hot-button issue that could be a deal breaker for your customers. Another lesser consideration is the kind of fabric used in the vinyls. Vinyl itself isn't just a plastic, but is instead a plastic coating placed over both sides of a fabric. The fabric is a large factor in the strength and durability of the vinyl. Ideally your manufacturer will use a weft substrate fabric – this is something like cheesecloth. The advantage of weft substrate is that it resists ripping or tearing, so if the vinyl is punctured, the hole doesn't expand into a large rip. In fact the inflatable could suffer many punctures without dampening the inflation. Normal vinyl is made with a woven fabric core, and when punctured it will continue to rip along the grain of the weave.

Finger-Safe Netting All bounce houses come with some kind of netting along the sides to allow parents and operators to monitor the activity within. However, many manufacturers use one or two inch netting. A child bouncing can easily catch small fingers in netting of that size, resulting in dislocations or breaks – and a ruined event. Check to make sure the netting is fine enough that small fingers cannot fit in the openings, but still be easy to see through.

Deflation Prevention In addition to a potential safety hazard, nothing is as sad as seeing your bounce house sag and deflate in the middle of an event. At the very least make sure that your inflatable has a safety flap on the blower tube that closes if blower pressure stops. This will greatly reduce the rate of deflation and give you time to correct the blower problem or evacuate the inflatable. As an additional step consider using a blower alarm system, such as the Watchdog Blower Siren (Safety Air Systems) or the ToolKing blower with built-in Watchdog. A system like this will alert you of interruption to the airflow of a unit, whether from someone pulling out a cord or the blower failing. In fact several insurance companies offer a 5% discount if you use a blower warning system on your inflatables.

Slides Slides come with all of the safety concerns of bounce houses, plus a few of their own due to the truly awesome heights modern slides can reach. The United States Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) has a mandatory requirement for inflatable slides: "Inflatable rides need a sealed chamber to prevent the rapid collapse of ceiling and walls onto the rider if the electric power to the blower(s) fails." (CPSC Safety Bulletin 20207-0001, May 23, 2001) Unfortunately, at the time that the CPSC announced this, no such sealed chamber existed in any slides. Since then, some manufacturers have developed these safety chambers that keep the slide standing up and firm when the blower fails. Make sure to ask your manufacturer if they comply with this requirement.

Sunshades are another safety concern on slides. The real advantage isn't really keeping the harsh sun off kids, but instead to provide a roof-like impediment at the top of the slide to keep kids from trying to jump or flip down the slide. While the cushioned air of the slide probably makes serious injuries unlikely, it's another story entirely if the child bounces or otherwise falls off the top of the slide! **The Bottom Line** Ensuring the safety of your inflatables isn't just the right thing to do, it also makes good business sense. Many insurance companies offer discounts for certain safety features, and all of them will require basic regulatory safety compliance. Safety can also give you an advantage over your competition. Imagine if your website or brochures had a sidebar listing the safety features detailed above and reminded your customers make sure their rental company complied with them all. Now imagine that your competition doesn't list all the same safety features, and can't tell their customers that they have them. Who do you think will get the customer's business? **Checklist** Here's a simple checklist of questions to ask your manufacturer about every inflatable you purchase:

- o Does the inflatable comply with all New Jersey regulations on inflatable amusement rides?
- o Does the inflatable use lead-free paint?
- o Does the inflatable use finger-safe netting? Can a small child's fingers fit through the holes in the netting, leading to potential injury?
- o Does the inflatable have a safety flap on the blower tube that closes if blower pressure stops?
- o Do they offer any kind of blower warning system? (this can be purchased separately from your manufacturer)

Additional Questions if the Inflatable is a Slide:

- o Does the slide have a sealed chamber to prevent collapse, as required by the CPSC (Safety Bulletin 20207-0001)?
- o Does the slide include a built-in sunshade to prevent children from jumping from the top of the slide?

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