A guide to the safe operation of Inflatable Play Equipment
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This booklet is produced as a brief guide for owners and operators of inflatable play equipment to assist in its safe operation. The information included is based on definitive guidance and best practice.

Further detailed advice can be found in:-

- BS EN 14960:2013; and
- TIPE - Safe use and operation of inflatable play equipment, including bouncy castles.

Acknowledgment

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Buying and selling inflatables

**Do manufacturers need to comply with any standards when they are making an inflatable device?**

Manufacturers must ensure that they manufacture their products so that they are, so far as is reasonably practicable, safe in use. Inflatables must be manufactured in accordance with good manufacturing practice, using suitable quality materials and a suitable design. Inflatables should be manufactured in accordance with **BS EN 14960:2013 Inflatable play equipment - Safety requirements and test methods** (referred to in the rest of this document as ‘**The Standard**’) or an equivalent standard.

**What should I check when buying an inflatable device?**

When you are buying an inflatable device, ensure that you are buying from a reputable supplier and that it has been manufactured to the required standard. The designer or manufacturer needs to have taken into account the following:

- **There are no sharp exterior angles or edges** - there shall be no parts of the inflatable or ancillary equipment which will cause injury to the user if contact is made with them.

- **There are no significant entrapment points** between adjacent surfaces.

- For bouncy castles in particular, that the **walls are high enough, strong enough and attached to the base to prevent users falling out, bouncing over or slipping through gaps**, in normal use or foreseeable misuse.

**Please note!**

As a general rule, the height of anyone using an inflatable should not exceed the height of the outside walls when the user stands on the bouncing surface. Walls measuring 1.8 metres or higher (measured from the bouncing surface) are sufficient for users of any height.
In the case of inflatable slides, the maximum user height will be determined by the height of the barrier at the top of the slope.

- **The maximum number and size of the users** that the structure can safely contain at any one time should be specified in the operation manual and should be displayed on the inflatable device in a prominent location.
• **The deflation time is sufficient to allow the structure to be safely evacuated.** The deflation time can be significantly increased by using a non-return valve or flap fitted to the blower or by fitting the blow tube to the lowest part of the structure as near to the ground as possible.

Inflation tube showing the reference number of the inflatable

Blowers inflating at high level are of a 'vari speed' type

Example of how a blower flap works to increase deflation time if the blower stops working
What documentation should be available if I am buying or selling an inflatable device?

For inflatables manufactured after January 2006, a declaration by the manufacturer/supplier that the inflatable has been manufactured to an appropriate design and in an appropriate manner. This can be achieved by a declaration of conformity to The Standard and an operator’s manual (produced in the appropriate language) which includes:-

- height clearance and space required to operate the unit safely;
- overall packed weights and dimensions;
- details of routine maintenance and inspections;
- appropriate daily checks;
- maximum numbers and heights of users;
- maximum safe wind speed;
- details on how to install the unit;
- method of anchorage and number of anchor points;
- maximum allowable slope of the site;
- crowd control measures;
- details of safe operation;
- type and size of blower required;
- specification of mats used to protect entrance and exit points.

Please note!

This list is a basic guide. The full requirements can be found in section 6 of The Standard. The operating manual can also be a good place to record maintenance, and any modifications.
Who is responsible for providing this documentation?

Where a device has been manufactured in Great Britain, the duty to provide the necessary information falls to the manufacturer.

For a second hand or hired device the duty falls on the controller (see page 9 for definition).

The controller of a newly acquired or second hand device should ensure that the operator’s manual is present and complete. The record of maintenance, modifications and inspections should accompany any second hand device.

In the case of an imported, new or second hand device, the duty falls to the importer.

Please note!

If there is no documentation available for the inflatable device, we strongly recommend that you do not go ahead with the purchase.
Responsibility for safety

Who is responsible for the safety of the inflatable play equipment?

‘The Standard’ defines the following roles:

CONTROLLERS

• The person, organisation or hirer (those who hire to others) who have overall control of the equipment and who are responsible for the inspection and maintenance of the inflatable device.

OPERATORS

• The person(s) should be over 18 years, appointed by the controller to be in charge of the operation of the inflatable at any time when it is intended to be available for public use.

ATTENDANTS

• Any person over 16 years appointed to work under the control and direction of an operator to assist in the operation of the inflatable device

Duties of controllers and operators

The Management of Health and Safety Regulations 1999 requires owners or operators of devices to carry out a risk assessment of their activities to determine the control measures required to avoid risk or reduce risk to an acceptable level. This will be relatively easy to do using the manufacturer’s information and instructions for safe operation. The operator’s manual should be made readily available for use and inspection where necessary.
Inspection requirements

Form of inspection

Is there a requirement to carry out inspections on my inflatable device?

Yes - The Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 (PUWER) requires inflatable devices to be inspected at suitable intervals, to ensure that the safe conditions are maintained and that any deterioration in the device is detected and remedial action is taken. A thorough inspection should take place at least every 12 months, in addition to daily checks before the first use of each day they are in use. All checks must be carried out by competent persons. Maintenance must also be carried out as necessary by a competent person.

What is the basis for the annual inspection of an inflatable?

‘The Standard’ also includes the requirements to maintain and operate inflatable play equipment safely.
Types of appliances requiring inspection

What type of equipment does ‘The Standard’ apply to?

‘The Standard’ applies to inflatable play equipment intended for use by children fourteen years and under.

This standard specifies safety requirements for inflatable play equipment for which the primary activities are bouncing and sliding and includes the following inflatables:
‘The Standard’

**What is the purpose of ‘The Standard’?**

‘The Standard’ sets out measures to address risks and minimise accidents to users for those involved in the design, manufacture and supply of inflatable play equipment; it also specifies the information to be supplied with the equipment.

**Approved inspection schemes**

**Who should carry out the annual inspection?**

All inflatable play equipment should be tested annually through either the PIPA (Pertexa Inflatable Play Accreditation) certification scheme or the ADIPS (Amusement Device Inspection Procedures Scheme). It is important to ensure that the person carrying out the inspection is competent. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) accept that any Controller using an ADIPS inspector or an inspector from the PIPA register will have shown they have used a ‘competent person’.

PIPA certification and ADIPS Declarations of Compliance (DOCs) are both recognised by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) as ‘best practice’ in relation to the testing of inflatable play equipment.

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**Please note!**

*The PIPA and ADIPS schemes only apply to the testing of inflatables and do not have any input on the operation or the training of controllers, supervisors or attendants.*

PIPA testers are not able to issue ADIPS docs and ADIPS Inspectors are not able to issue PIPA certificates.

Other inspectors are not able to issue either.
Do all inflatables require an annual inspection/test, even if they are not covered by ‘The Standard’?

All inflatable play equipment requires an annual test even if it falls outside of ‘The Standard’. Inspectors will use any relevant parts of ‘The Standard’ and risk assess those parts not covered by ‘The Standard’. Once completed, a certificate will be issued.

Competency of inspectors/documentation

How would I recognise whether the inspector is using one of the approved schemes?

The following shows what the relevant registration and inspection certificates look like.

The Inspector must have been examined and registered as competent by the Register of Play Inspectors International (RPII).
What should the inspection include?

The annual inspection/test needs to be carried out by a competent person and should include checks of the following:

- Previous inspection reports and certificates where appropriate.
- Provision of a blower unit as specified by the manufacturer or one that at least provides sufficient pressure to allow the inflatable to be used safely. This blower should be suitably guarded at the air inlet and outlet.
- The condition of the blower impeller and fan casing where it is practical to inspect.
- The condition of the electrical wiring to the blower which is accessible.
- The condition of all electrical installations being used.
- The anchorage system, for wear, rips or chafing.
- That the type and number of ground anchors or ballast being used conforms to the design specification.
- That the structure of the device does not have wear or rips in the fabric.
- That walls and towers, where fitted, are firm and upright.
- That the pressure is sufficient in the bouncing area and at the step/front area to give a reliable and firm footing.
- That the internal ties should be checked for wear and tear particularly at loose or exposed ends.
- The integrity of bed seams, wall-to-bed seams and wall to tower connections.
- The identification of the device (the serial number).
- If used on a fixed site, the location.
This list is not exhaustive and the manufacturers may specify additional items. The annual inspection must include any part of the inflatable and its ancillary equipment which may affect the safe operation of the device.
The locations used to site inflatable play equipment will be either:

- outdoors (soft surfaces)
- outdoors (hard surfaces)
- indoors

**Do I need to carry out a risk assessment before locating my inflatable?**

Under the Management of Health and Safety at work Regulations 1999, owners or operators of inflatable devices will need to carry out a risk assessment of their activities to determine the control measures needed to avoid risk or reduce risk to an acceptable level. The manufacturer’s information and instructions for safe operation should be used as the basis for this.

**Please note!**

You will also need to take into account relevant local factors which may have an effect on the safe operation of the equipment – ground conditions, prevailing weather conditions etc.

**What kind of hazards need to be considered as part of the risk assessment process?**

Below is a list of hazards which have been known to occur:

- Instability and blowing away in windy conditions.
- Situations caused by loss of pressure in the inflatable as a result of:
  - *Failure of the fabric*
  - *Failure or loss of power to the blower*
  - *Disconnection of the blower*
  - *Litter blocking the air intake and/or vents*
• Falls from the structure.
• Tripping (particularly over the anchorage).
• Injury to users caused by boisterous behaviour, overcrowding, larger users not being separated from smaller ones.
• Access to dangerous (parts of) machinery – for example inadequately protected or unguarded blowers.
• Electrical hazards (shocks and burns).
• Inadequate means of escape in case of fire.
• Lifting injuries caused by manual handling.
• Injuries to users caused by them wearing inappropriate clothes and shoes.
• Entrapment and suffocation.

**Daily checks**

These checks should be carried out before the first use on any day, in accordance with the advice provided by the manufacturer in the operating manual.

These should include checking that:-

- the site remains suitable with crowd control measures in place if appropriate;
- anchors are intact, protected where necessary and ropes are not worn or chafed;
- anchors secure the inflatable device to the ground;
- there are no significant holes or rips in the fabric or seams that are likely to compromise the safe operation of the unit.
• the correct blower specified for the device is being used and the air pressure is sufficient to give reliable and firm footing.

• there are no exposed electrical contacts or wear on electric cables, and plugs, sockets and switches are not damaged.

• if an internal combustion engine is used, the fuel cap is firmly on the fuel tank and any reserve of fuel is stored in a suitable container and is located in a safe position.

• the blower's bolts and screws are properly secured and that robust guards are secured over the air intake and air outlet.

• the blower inflation tube is firmly fixed to the blower, the blower is positioned correctly and is adequately protected and guarded.

• the blower cannot cause a tripping hazard.

Please note!

If any defects are found whilst carrying out the daily checks, the device should not be used by the public until they have been rectified by a competent person.

Maintenance

The inflatable needs to be properly maintained. The operator’s manual supplied by the manufacturer will specify the maintenance required.

If the instructions are not available the controller should specify the procedures required, in conjunction with advice from a competent person and the supplier or manufacturer.

Records of all maintenance work must be retained.

Please note!
Anchorage

**How much anchorage is needed to safely secure inflatable play equipment, to reduce instability and blowing away?**

The inflatable must be provided with an anchorage and/or ballast system and any necessary accessories enabling the inflatable to be securely fixed to the ground. The number of anchor points will vary depending on the inflatable, but even in the case of the smallest device this will never be less than six. The manufacturer’s specification and instructions will indicate the number required. If the instructions are not available you should ask a competent inspector to specify how many anchor points are required to operate the inflatable safely.

- Every available anchor point, including those located at high level on the inflatable, must be used.
- Anchor points must NEVER be doubled up onto one anchor stake, as this will compromise the safe loading of these stakes.
- The anchor points must be distributed around the perimeter of the inflatable and must be fitted with metal O rings, D rings or triangles if produced after March 2014.
What is the maximum wind speed that you can operate inflatables in?

Serious accidents and fatalities have arisen where inflatables have been operated in windy conditions.

As a general rule the maximum wind-speed in which inflatables can be used outdoors is 38 km/h, which equates to Force 5 on the Beaufort Scale (which is when small trees in leaf begin to sway) or in accordance with the maximum wind speed specified in the manufacturer’s instructions, whichever is lower. On the morning of the event or the night before, listen carefully to the weather forecast so that you have a good idea of what wind to expect.

On the day and during the event, you can check the wind-speed using an anemometer.

Where is the best place to take wind speed once the inflatable is in use?

At the location where the inflatable is to be used. If using a large area, wind speed can vary across the site; consequently, it is important to take a number of readings across the whole of the site.

How do I ensure that the inflatable is secured adequately to the ground?

When used outdoors the inflatable must be secured to the ground, preferably with ground stakes where the ground is suitable. It is also important that not only the anchorage point on the inflatable but also all of the components of the anchorage and/or ballast system, such as ropes, webbings, metal attachments, stakes and weights, can withstand a force of 1600 Newtons (N), which is the equivalent of 163 kilograms.

Every available anchor point including those located at high level on the inflatable must be used.
Staking on soft surfaces (outdoors)

Ground stakes must incline away from the direction of the exerted force and must be at an angle of between 30 – 45 degrees. There should be no more than 25mm of the stake above ground level.

Ground stakes must be a minimum of 380 mm long and a minimum of 16 mm in diameter and their tops must be rounded.

It is important that checks are made to ensure that there are no underground cables in the area where the inflatable device is to be located, which could be damaged by stakes being used. The ground conditions – for example if the ground is wet, soft or sandy - may not provide sufficient anchorage for the stakes; if this is the case, ballast may be required as well as additional stakes.
Setting up outdoors on grass/earth

What do I need to look for when choosing a site for my inflatable?

• The site must be big enough to accommodate the equipment, bearing in mind the open space needed at the front and sides and the length of the blow tube.

• The site must be level or have a slope of not more than 5 degrees in any direction.

• Check for possible hazards such as overhead power lines or other obstacles with hazardous projections (for example fences and/or trees).

• Consider whether any underground cables may be compromised by inserting stakes to secure your inflatable.

• Check for any sharp or embedded objects which may need to be removed before setting up your inflatable.

Please note! Before you roll out the canvas, make sure that it is positioned facing the right way and that all the siting rules have been met.
Once I have selected my site, what happens next?

Step 1 - Anchor it down temporarily

✓ If ropes form part of the anchorage system, check they are all in good condition and attach them to the anchor points.

✓ The windward side of the inflatable needs to be anchored temporarily while it is inflating. Drive anchor stakes into the ground on the windward side and loosely tie on the windward side ropes.

✓ If you are using industry standard 380mm long x minimum 16mm diameter stakes, there is little risk of penetrating underground services. However, you should check that there are no obvious signs of excavation for cable runs, pipes etc and check with the client for the location of any underground services before driving the stakes in.

Step 2 - Inflate

✓ Make sure onlookers keep away.

✓ Ensure all electrical equipment is suitable for outdoor use.

✓ Check that you have the correct size and type of blower and attach it securely to the blow tube.

✓ Tie up any other tubes and close any zips.

✓ Switch on the blower and allow the inflatable to inflate fully.

✓ Watch the temporary anchorages you have connected in case they are positioned wrongly and pull tight.

✓ If they do pull tight, switch off the blower quickly and re-position either the inflatable or the stake, or loosen the rope.

Please note!

Once the inflatable is fully inflated, you can push or pull it into its correct position.
Step 3 - Anchor it down permanently

✓ You MUST use every anchorage point on the inflatable because their number and positioning has been calculated for each inflatable by the manufacturer.

✓ Drive an anchor stake into the ground for each remaining anchorage point and securely connect the ropes or webbings.

Where high level anchor points are provided these must also be used, using ropes with a minimum breaking strain of 1600 N.

✓ The original temporary anchorages might need moving to ensure they are in the correct position.

✓ The stakes need to be positioned so that the ropes or webbings go upwards from the stake towards the inflatable at between 30 and 45 degrees. Moving the stake closer makes the angle bigger. Moving it away makes the angle smaller.

✓ The stakes should be driven into the ground slightly inclined away from the inflatable and the ropes or webbings should not be pulled too tight. They should curve gently up to the inflatable, to allow the inflatable to move up and down when in use.

If the inflatable needs anchorages in the impact area make sure the stakes are as close in to the base of the inflatable as possible. You could also cover them with a safety mat.
Step 4 - Adjust the position of the blower and ensure it is working safely

- The blower needs to be moved as far away from the inflatable as the blow tube will allow and then moved forward 50mm, to leave a little free play between blower and inflatable.

- This will ensure that the blower is not pulled when people are bouncing on the inflatable.

The blower must stand at least 1.2 metres away from the inflatable therefore the tube would need to be 1.4 -1.5 metres long.

How do I make sure my blower is safe when in use?

- If you are using an electric blower, route the cable(s) out of the way of users and onlookers.

- Use an RCD circuit breaker somewhere in the line.

- If you are using any reel-style extension cables ensure that they are fully unwound to prevent the risk of fire.

- The fan and all leads and plugs should be checked for damage.

Please note!

All electrical connections and sockets should be of an outdoor type.

- If you are using a petrol engine blower, make sure no-one can burn themselves on the exhaust pipe and that the petrol cap is on.

- It is strongly recommended that petrol blowers/generators are fenced off.
Keep your spare petrol out of sight and stored in a bund container.

When you need to re-fill with petrol, stop the session and get everyone away.

Switch off the blower and let it cool for a few minutes; then use a funnel to re-fill the petrol tank so that no petrol is spilled.

Return your spare petrol to its secure location.

**Step 5 – Check the working pressure**

All inflatables need sufficient internal air pressure to make them stand up and assume their correct shape and to support the weight of the users.

You can check the pressure is sufficient inside the inflatable by standing on the lowest part of the inflated base (usually the step) with your feet together and making sure that your feet do not touch the ground through the inflatable.

You must stand at least 50cm from the edge and weigh a minimum of 85 kilograms. If you are heavier than the intended user and your feet do not touch the ground, then the pressure will be sufficient.

If you are lighter than the intended user, get a heavier person to help.

If you are using a petrol-engine blower, regulate the speed of the engine so that the pressure inside the inflatable is not too great. An electric blower does not need regulating unless it is part of a “moonwalk” as this requires a Vari speed.
What if I want to put up a perimeter fence to control crowds?

If, for crowd-control purposes, a perimeter fence is used it must be at least 1.8 metres from walled sides and at least 3.5 metres from open sides. The gateway must be 1 metre wide. If there are guy-ropes on a high inflatable they must be contained within the fenced area.

**KEY**

- Perimeter fence
- 1. At least 1.8m
- 2. Walled Side
- 3. At least 3.5m
- 4. Open Side
- 5. Gate

Please note!

A lower standard would be acceptable where the public does not have access to the sides or the back of the inflatable, or crowd pressure is not anticipated.
Setting up outdoors on hard surfaces

Can I put my inflatable on a hard standing?

On hard standing, you won’t be able to anchor with stakes driven into the ground. Each anchor point must be attached to something which will withstand a force of 1600N, which is the equivalent of 163 kilograms on each anchor point. This could be weights, sandbags or vehicles, provided they are immobilised and under your control or fittings already in the ground, as long as they can cope with a minimum force of 1600N.

If you are near the edge of hard standing, you can sometimes anchor the rear and one side of the inflatable with stakes into the ground beyond the hard standing, leaving only one side to be anchored in the ways suggested above.

Please note!

There should be a minimum distance of 2.4 metres between each inflatable.
Are there any other safety considerations when locating my inflatable on a hard standing?

Yes:

- **Protect the base of your inflatable** - If the hard standing is abrasive, you must use a groundsheet under the inflatable to prevent wearing on the base of the inflatable.

- **Keep the blower still and in position** - A blower running on hard standing tends to move around because of the vibrations. To avoid this stand the blower on a rubber mat.

- **Use landing mats** - On hard standing you will need landing mats which cover the whole of the impact area; you will need to be on your guard against them moving whilst the session is in progress.

- **Consider the impact area** - The impact area is the area of ground immediately next to any open side of the inflatable and it extends to 1.2 metres away. For instance, on an ordinary castle with 3 walled sides and one open side with a full width step, it is the area shaped like a U all around the step. Some common examples of inflatables which have impact areas are castle types, flat-beds and up and over slides.

  a) Castle type     b) Flat - bed     c) Up and Over Slide

![Diagram of Castle Type Inflatable](image)

**KEY**

1) Walled side  2) At least  3) 1.2 metres  4) Open side  
5) Impact area  6) Exit  7) Entrance
Setting up indoors

What if the inflatable is to be used indoors?

When the inflatable is used indoors, the anchorage and/or ballast system should be used, when necessary, to maintain stability.

Safe operation

Rules for operators

• Follow the manufacturer’s instructions using all anchor points as directed, secured with the appropriate stakes into the ground or, if a hard standing, an equally effective method.

• Inflatables must not be used when winds exceed the maximum safe wind speed specified by the manufacturer are exceeded. (Industry standard indicates maximum of force 5 on the Beaufort Scale – fresh breeze when small trees in leaf begin to sway). It is good practice to check the weather forecast by contacting the Met Office on the day the inflatable is to be used.

• The controller or operator who is responsible for siting the inflatable device should position it well away from possible hazards such as overhead power lines and obstacles with projections such as fences.

• The ground surface should be in a suitable condition. Place a groundsheet under the inflatable where the surface is abrasive, oily or dirty.
• The controller on site should determine the minimum number of attendants needed to operate the device safely and ensure that at least this numbers is on duty when the device is in operation.

• To determine the minimum number of attendants, the controller needs to consider the following:
  - The number of people using the device.
  - The height of the users.
  - The type of environment in which the inflatable is being used.

Please note! The attendants should be at least 16 years old and the operator should be at least 18 years old.

Admitting the users onto the device should be carried out in a controlled and safe manner. Operators and attendants are required to ensure that the following rules are observed:

• Users’ footwear should be removed (except socks) along with any other sharp, hard or dangerous objects – for example buckles, pens, purses or badges. Glasses are best removed if at all possible.

• No food (including chewing gum) or drinks to be consumed whilst using the device.

• Users should not obstruct the entrance or exit of the inflatable.

• The steps or front apron of a bouncy castle should be kept clear.

• Users should not be allowed to climb or hang onto the walls of the castle.
• If height restrictions are specified by the manufacturer, any user must comply with this requirement.

• Onlookers must not block the entrance/exit to the inflatable. The operator and attendants need a clear view so that users can enter and exit the inflatable safely.

• Users should not be allowed onto the device during its inflation or deflation.

• Operators and attendants need to pay constant attention to the activity on the inflatable. A whistle or other signal should be used and action taken immediately if any misbehaviour arises. Somersaults and rough play should not be allowed.

• The operator is responsible for ensuring the equipment is not overloaded and should separate larger, more boisterous users from smaller users.

• The number of users should be limited to allow sufficient room for them to play safely.

**Training of operators/attendants**

*What training does the owner (controller) of the inflatable need to provide so that staff can operate the inflatable safely?*

The controller should ensure that all operators and attendants receive effective training in the working of the device and safe operation as described in the ‘Rules for operators.

The training will also need to include:

- Method of operating the device.

- Safe methods of assembly and dismantle.
- A list of the daily checks which need to be made before use.

- What to do in case of power failure, or other emergencies e.g. sudden change in weather conditions.

- Procedure for recording and reporting accidents/defects and breakdowns.

**Accident recording and reporting**

**What should I do if an accident occurs?**

As the controller of the device you will need to be aware of any accidents that occur whilst the device is in use. You therefore need to have a procedure which operators and attendants can follow.

- First deal with the causalities.

- Record what happened and the name and contact details of the injured person(s).

- Record the name and contact details of any witnesses.

- Instruct the operator/attendant to contact you as soon as possible after the accident has occurred.

**Please note!**

In some instances it may be necessary to report an accident which causes injury (including acts of violence) or certain dangerous occurrences to the enforcing authority (Local Authority or HSE) by the responsible person – such as the controller or operator. Further information can be found on the HSE Website [http://www.hse.gov.uk/riddor/report.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/riddor/report.htm)
References/further information

1. Information Sheet 49 – ‘Safe use and operation of inflatable play equipment including bouncy castles’ – produced by TIPE (The Inflatable Play Enterprise) www.tipe.co.uk/info49.pdf

2. BS EN 14960:2013 Inflatable play equipment – safety requirements and test methods.

3. PIPA - www.pipa.org.uk

For further information on health and safety legislation applicable to your business please email: foodandoccupationalssafety@harrogate.gov.uk