

SAFETY NOTICE

Bounce House Safety



The presence of “moon bounces”, “bounce houses” and other inflatable amusements has grown significantly in recent years. Parents buy them for their back yard, every public family event seems to feature them and entire entertainment venues have been started based solely on inflatable rides. School districts have also started to embrace these amusements for “Fun Days” or end-of-year parties. These can be as simple as a 4-sided structure or a very elaborate maze of activities, including water elements.

The ease of being able to rent a bounce house from a local dealer or even buy your own is often an attractive addition for the kids. However, these inflatables carry significant risks of serious injury and even death. Over a recent 10-year window, there were over 113,000 emergency room treated injuries in the US from inflatable rides. Please read the following information so you can make an informed decision about whether these amusements are worth the risk.

Regulations

Unlike a simple moon bounce you would buy for private use, inflatable amusements used by a commercial entity, including a school, fall under the NJ Carnival-Amusement Ride Safety Act. They are subject to certain engineering requirements, permitting and inspection by the NJ Department of Community Affairs. All inflatable rides must meet these regulatory requirements whether rented or purchased. If a district were to purchase their own inflatable, it must be on the approved DCA list. If not, an engineering review would be required with a corresponding application fee.

Like regular amusement rides, all inflatables are subject to annual permitting and inspections. There may also be fire and electrical codes that must be followed.

Critical Concerns

The use of bounce houses creates a variety of safety and risk management issues. Even if renting from an independent company you must consider their experience, use of approved inflatables, up-to-date inspections, proper insurance coverage with adequate limits, set-up and take-down services and customer support to ensure regulatory compliance. There are many rental companies out there that are small “Mom and Pop” entities or side jobs for the owners. They may not be fully versed on all the regulations, be adequately insured or provide necessary support. Fully vetting a rental company is a critical risk management step.



Managing the Risk

Purchasing or borrowing an inflatable ride is highly discouraged. There are simply too many variables regarding regulatory requirements, engineering issues, safety and maintenance of the ride to effectively minimize the risks. Should the district decide to utilize inflatables for events, they should be rented from a well-established, experienced company with proper insurance. NJ law requires a minimum of \$1 million in coverage, however, we know that a million dollars in a catastrophic loss situation is insufficient. The district should require a minimum of \$2 million in liability coverage, but strive for at least a \$5 million limit or umbrella.

Operational Oversight

- Obtain Certificates of Insurance. Verify the insurance is active. Obtain a Hold Harmless agreement and Additional Insured status if possible.
- Verify that the inflatable ride is approved by the NJ Department of Community Affairs at http://www.state.nj.us/dca/divisions/codes/publications/pdf_rides/permitted_rides.pdf
- Make sure the company provides current proof of annual inspection for the ride.
- With a company representative, identify the proposed location of the ride to ensure it is safe. This should be on relatively level ground free to debris that could cause a puncture. It is recommended that a protective tarp be placed on the ground under the ride. There should be no overhead obstructions or power lines.
- All assembly and disassembly of the ride should be done by the ride owner to ensure it is done in accordance with manufacturer guidelines. All anchors, tie-downs and/or ballast should be in good condition and meet or exceed manufacturer requirements.
- Anchors, tie-downs, blowers and electrical cords should be located away from paths of travel. Electrical cords must be plugged in to a GFCI-protected receptacle.
- Behavioral and warning signage meeting N.J.A.C. 5:14A-9.33-34 must be posted.
- Trained ride operators must be over the age of 16. It is **highly** recommended that the ride operators be supplied by the rental company to further insulate the district against liability versus using staff or volunteers. If the district is to provide the operators, the rental company must train them in accordance with manufacturer's guidelines.
- The rental company should provide emergency guidelines for evacuation protocols for deflation, extreme weather, high winds, anchor failure and similar issues.
- Manufacturer's guidelines must be followed for critical items such as maximum ride capacity, min/max height requirements and maximum wind exposures.
- Never mix older, larger kids with small kids in the same group. No shoes, eyeglasses, sunglasses or sharp objects should be permitted. Absolutely no flipping or pushing.
- Additional safety items may need to be addressed. Use the safety checklist available at www.spelljif.com. Please contact the JIF Safety Director for assistance.

