



INFORMATION SHEET 5

How to Safely Hire a Bouncy Castle

**We have all read the press headlines regarding incidents on 'Bouncy Castles'.
Who in their right mind would hire one of these for their children to play on?
Fear not as all is not what it may seem.**

The world of inflatable play equipment, bouncy castles etc, is very complex and not quite as simple as a lay person might envisage. The idea behind this information sheet is to give you enough information to be able to hire bouncy castles and have a safe party or event.

We continue to keep seeing alarming headlines like '2 injured in bouncy castle tragedy'. One of the most amazing facts is that all inflatables seem to be labelled as 'bouncy castles' whether they are or not. The tragic accident in Durham, in 2006, drew similar headlines and yet it was not even a piece of play equipment but a work of art.

One other cause for concern is the increase in 'toy' inflatable (figure 1) equipment readily available at large stores and wholesalers around the country. To the untrained eye they look the same as those that have been around for years but the fact is they are totally different. The construction methods differ, the materials used differ and they do not meet the requirements of the Health & Safety at Work etc Act 1974 or the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 (PUWER) for commercial hire and BS EN 14960:2006. Many schools, youth clubs, charities and others have found, to their cost, that these units are uninsurable. You also need to be aware that if you use these at public events, lend one to your neighbour or use them for hire you would be liable for damages awarded in court following any incident as they will not be covered by any insurance



Figure 1 - typical 'toy' inflatable



Figure 2 - typical 'commercial unit.

How safe are inflatables?

To put the whole thing in perspective a recent government survey estimated that there were some 3500 - 4000 accidents in 2007. However, this figure includes all those that occurred on units privately owned, those that happened on trampolines as well as those that happened whilst being supervised by members of the public. It is conservatively estimated that there are over 30,000 hires of inflatable equipment each weekend during the season so the percentages speak for themselves.

There are over 3500 bouncy castle hire companies in the UK that will hire you a bouncy castle and providing you follow some basic rules when hiring equipment you should not experience any problems.

Check out your local suppliers and ask a few basic questions to ascertain which you feel most confident with.

The following questions are a must.

1. Do you hire commercial grade units?

Most will always say yes but there are some unscrupulous hirers that do hire out the toy grade. Most toy grade carry a sign 'not for commercial use' and should a unit be delivered to you carrying this warning you should refuse delivery. Toy grade inflatables are not insurable. Look for a sign that states 'EN 14960 compliant' as this will indicate a commercial grade unit

2. Can you let me have a copy of a current test certificate?

Under the Health & Safety at Work etc Act 1974 and The Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 (PUWER) all bouncy castle hire companies are required to have their units tested annually. The only testing schemes recognised by the Health & Safety Executive are those carried out by ADIPS or PIPA. However, it is possible for a bouncy castle hire company to have units tested by a 'competent person'. Since the introduction of BS EN 14960:2006, European Standard for the safe manufacture, testing and operation of inflatable play equipment, it is fairly safe to assume that a RPII registered inspector trained to this European Standard would be deemed a 'competent person'. Make sure you ask to see copies of safety certificates.

3. Do you have Public Liability Insurance?

Whilst it is not a legal requirement most reputable bouncy castle hire companies will have insurance cover. However, you need to be aware that this type of insurance will only cover the operator and his staff and **WILL NOT** cover the Hiree (the person hiring the equipment) in the unfortunate event of an incident occurring. It may be that your household or organisations insurance will cover you but you will need to check. It may be possible for the bouncy castle hire company to inform you of an insurer. You should see a copy of the companies insurance policy

4. What are my responsibilities?

The bouncy castle hire company should inform you that you will be responsible for the security of the equipment for the duration of the hire, provision of a safe electricity supply, safe operation of the equipment as per issued 'Operating Instructions' and **constant adult supervision**. If you feel that you are unable to provide constant supervision you should ask the hire company if they can provide a supervisor for you. Some companies offer this service whilst others are unable to. It is advisable to book as early as possible as supervised units are limited by most companies due to staffing levels

5. Will you tell me how to operate the equipment?

Bouncy castle hire companies are required to give a full explanation on how to operate the equipment safely. Most bouncy castle hire companies will give you these in writing although a verbal explanation will fulfil their obligations under the Health & Safety at Work etc Act 1974 and The Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 (PUWER).

6. Will you confirm my booking?

Many bouncy castle hire companies do not issue written confirmations and most will be fine. However, it is certainly better to have your order confirmed in writing as this should always confirm date of booking, times required, agreed fee, agreed payment terms and your obligations.

7. What happens if it is raining?

Bouncy castle hire companies have different ways of dealing with this just make sure that whatever is agreed is in the 'Terms & Conditions of Hire'. You should also be aware that some bouncy castle hire companies will cancel bookings in the event of high or gusting winds.

8. What age group is the equipment suitable for?

Most inflatables/bouncy castles are normally booked for a family celebration. It is inevitable that the big kids (adults) will want to 'have a go'. You need to be aware that most units are only suitable for up to 14 year olds. You should always consider hiring adult units at family events to avoid any difficulties. All units now have a maximum user height as opposed to age and these should be clearly displayed on the unit. You should hire a unit with walls over 1.8m to accommodate adults.

Providing you hire from a reputable bouncy castle hire company and follow the correct operating procedures you can be fairly confident of a trouble free and safe event.

See also our [Information Sheet 15](#) - Industry Jargon Buster

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Sources:

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