

Inspecting a play frame and equipment is only a part of an independent annual inspection for family entertainment centres. Safety management and procedures with supporting documents and records fall well within an inspection's scope. Areas to be considered include several topics.



Is your play centre **safe?**

Admission Procedures and Security

"I am often surprised and not a little disturbed at the relative ease by which I can occasionally enter a Play Centre. My ID is not requested and there is no referral to management," says indoor play safety inspector, Nick Balmforth. However in his experience most FECs do have workable and secure booking-in and booking-out procedures and maximum-number control. Most have security gates very often backed up by CCTV and usually continuously staffed reception.

Room Safety

Recurring safety issues include; furniture obstructing important escape routes and fire doors, hard furniture pushed up against netting, unprotected door hinges and electricity cables and visibility into the play frame obscured by signage. Fortunately, most of these problems and failures can be solved in a moment and at no cost. Where some time and cost is involved it is usually insignificant and a one-time action.

Equipment Checking Procedures

According to Nick Balmforth, daily checking of the play frame and equipment is pivotal to a safety system and needs to be treated as an important priority. Where that is found not to be the case, he has discovered staff completing the daily checklist without actually looking, hurried and late completion of checklists for inspection, recurring gaps in check lists and completed returns with no faults which raises doubts as to the vigilance of the check.

Fire Safety Management Procedures

One of Nick Balmforth's observations is that fire drills are only valid when they involve public evacuations with real customers in the middle of a busy session and are done at least quarterly. Detailed observation and recording of the drill should lead to improvements for the next time – and hopefully never for real. (SEE ALSO, Fire and Risk Assessment, *BfL* May 2007).

Accident/Incident Recording and Reporting Procedures

An essential part of the safety management system is using an accredited Accident Book. It must be completed legibly with complete and specific details.

Cleaning Procedures

Good cleaning is important for hygiene and fire risk reasons and for the centre to be attractive to customers.

Staff Levels and Monitoring Procedures

This a matter of priority to which some play areas give insufficient emphasis particularly to the role of staff in directly monitoring the play frame. A risk assessment will determine the level of staff monitoring necessary for a play centre's ongoing safe operation. ■

Nick Balmforth is a member of the Register of Play Inspectors and a founder director of The Play Inspection Company. His full paper is available on the API website: www.api-play.org



HELP How to get help

To help indoor play operators Nick Bamforth with Lee Hubbucks has produced the booklet: "Managing Risk in Indoor Play". It gives advice on risk assessments and fire risk assessments. The UK industry Standard BS8409:2002 Soft Indoor Play Areas – Code of Practice identifies the scope of Independent Annual Inspections and is available from BSI Product Services www.bsi-global.com