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Inspection of inflatable equipment that fall outside of the scope of the PIPA Scheme Rules

It has come to the attention of the PIPA Leadership Group that some inspectors are examining and tagging equipment that is outside of the remit of the PIPA inspection scheme.

The HSE defines competence as the combination of training, skills, experience, and knowledge that a person has and their ability to apply them to perform a task safely.

Annex E of the scheme rules define what devices can be inspected by PIPA inspectors following completion of the associated training.

If you hold the necessary competence to carry the inspection of devices that are not within the scheme rules, then there is no legal impediment to prevent you carrying out the inspection.

However, you should consider carefully whether you hold the requisite training, skills, experience, and knowledge as in the event of an incident or an intervention by a Regulatory body, you are likely to be required to demonstrate and provide evidence of your stated competence.

Finally, any devices which fall outside of the scope of the PIPA scheme, must not reference the PIPA scheme within any inspection report or affix a PIPA tag or logo to the device(s).

The use of risk assessments to allow for non-conformity must be of a very limited nature and should be suitably documented and recorded onto the continuation sheets available on the scheme register.

The inspector is expected to have the relevant knowledge as to which inflatable devices can be inspected under the PIPA inspection scheme. If in any doubt an inspector should seek advice from the PIPA office or a PIPA mentor if available.

The following notes are for guidance only and are in no way exhaustive.

Types of inflatables that fall outside of the PIPA scheme:

- Large and multi section inflatable parks
- Inflatable designed to catch falling persons
- Sports and gymnastic inflatables
- Inflatable games, which are devices outside the scope of 'Non Ride-On Games' as defined by PIPA
- Waterborne inflatables
- Inflatables containing water
- Sealed pressure inflatables
- Inflatable buildings, marquees and architectural features
- Toy, domestic and garden inflatables including bouncy castles.

Large, multi-sectional inflatable parks.

Inspectors have been found to be assigning PIPA tags to either the whole, or to individual sections of installations that they judge to conform to BS/EN14960.

In order to receive a PIPA tag an inflatable must conform to one of the existing sections of BS/EN14960, this must be for the whole inflatable. Multi sectional inflatables designed and/or intended to form part of a play installation must be inspected as a whole and not in their component parts.

Some special considerations for large inflatable parks are, but not limited to;

- Large inflatable installations have many features that can be found in BS/EN 14960 but also often have features that do not
- Large inflatable installations are designed to be used as a whole and not as separate component units
- Large inflatable installations require special consideration for the ways that the individual sections interact with neighbouring components
- Large inflatable parks require special consideration relating to the flow of traffic (persons) while moving around the unit to reach the component sections
- Compromised inflation tube lengths and unusual routing
- Heightened fall heights and areas with increased risks of entrapment
- Games and elements encouraging competitive behaviour

Much of BS/EN 14960 can apply to elements of such inflatables.

Inflatables intended to catch falling persons.

Air pits, air filled landing bags and air filled foam pit replacements are complicated pieces of equipment that perform a very specific role and are often individual to a location, partnered with a specific piece of equipment and/or have a specific intended use.

Such inflatables are in no way intended for bouncing and sliding and as such PIPA inspectors are not assigned any competence to inspect these by their membership of the scheme.

Very little of BS/EN14960 can be seen to apply to such inflatables.

Sports & gymnastic inflatables

Whilst such equipment can appear to have a lot in common with the inflatables considered by BS/EN14960, their intended use is very different, often being specific to one sporting process or another and invariably being under closely supervised conditions.

Some of BS/EN14960 can be seen to apply to these classes of inflatable.

Inflatable Games – devices outside the scope of ‘Non Ride-On Games’ as defined by PIPA

As yet inflatable games such as bungee runs, pillow bash etc do not form a part of the PIPA inspection scheme, however work is under way with the co-operation of the HSE to produce guidance that, with suitable training, will enable various such items to be inspected under the PIPA scheme.

Non Ride-On Games are defined as inflatable games which a person does not have to get onto, inside, or into the inflatable to participate. Games covered are of ‘constant air’ design and NOT ‘solid air’ or ‘sealed air’ games which are excluded. The user is however able to come in contact and interact with the games briefly.

Waterborne Inflatables

Inflatable play equipment intended to float on water during use does not in any way fall within the PIPA inspection scheme, even though many are of a constant feed type and appear to have similarities to compliant inflatables.

Inspectors must not affix a PIPA tag to any waterborne inflatable or associate and/or use the PIPA logo on any inspection report or certificate issued in connection with such inflatables.

Such equipment can include, but is not limited to;

- Water floats
- Slides
- Obstacle challenges
- Pontoons
- Toys of any size or type

Very little of BS/EN14960 can be seen to apply to these classes of inflatable.

Inflatables containing water

Many inflatables are produced to contain water, some act as mobile pools for the flotation of water walker balls, zorbs and mini boats etc.

These are generally sealed pressure air inflatables that act as a bund to contain water.

Very little of BS/EN14960 can be seen to apply to these classes of inflatable.

Sealed pressure inflatables

Such inflatables are available in a very wide variety of styles, sizes and intended use, both on land and as a waterborne feature.

These inflatables are inflated via an air pump which is removed when the inflatable is filled and then sealed for the duration of its intended use.

No sealed pressure inflatables may be inspected under the PIPA inspection scheme, the PIPA tag and logo may not be used in connection with such inflatables under any circumstances.

Very little of BS/EN14960 can be seen to apply to these classes of inflatable.

Toy, domestic and garden inflatables including bouncy castles

How to identify non compliant units and cheap toys

Listed below are a number of ways to spot inflatables that aren't suitable for commercial use:

- Poor quality and very small anchor stakes
- Guide ropes made from 3-5mm string or cord
- These inflatables are usually supplied with a small, yellow, snail shaped fan rated at less than 1.0kW (1000W).
- Very thin nylon materials
- Not certified FR (Flame Retardant)
- Usually carry the CE toy mark
- Usually states 'Not for commercial use' or 'Domestic toy' on the label
- No mention of BS EN 14960 on the packaging
- Does not come with initial test certification to BS EN 14960
- No mention of maximum user height and user numbers which should be clearly visible whilst the inflatable is in use
- Low wall heights and a floppy feel to them
- Usually delivered in a box

Manufacturers of these types of equipment are producing these in a wide variety of styles and colours and many are willing to supply paperwork/certificates claiming compliance, an inspector must be very careful here.

Some units. Especially those Widley available in white and pastel colours are Widley available for hire and are being presented for inspection,

These inflatables are generally not of sufficient quality for professional use and certification under the PIPA scheme.

If in doubt inspectors are advised to contact PIPA for guidance, if you inspect and TAG such a non conforming inflatable you may face disciplinary procedures and have to remove the tag from the inflatable.