



Loss Prevention Topics



Bleacher Safety

Bleachers present a large exposure to the school and to all who use them. So, it is important to take proper precautions to help ensure bleacher related incidents do not occur on your grounds.

In 1999 the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) held a roundtable on bleacher and grand stand safety. Attending were facility owners and operators, school officials, manufacturers, designers, and regulatory officials.

Guidelines that were developed by the experts who attended that meeting appear in a free publication entitled "Guidelines for Retrofitting Bleachers." The document may be downloaded free at the CPSC website. (Go to www.cpsc.gov and click on CPSC Publications. Then go to Public Use Products. You will find the publication on this page.)

Guidelines for Bleacher Safety

An examination of the CPSC guidelines reveals recommendations for guardrails, openings, maintenance and much more.

CPSC recommends that openings in guardrails should prevent passage of a four-inch sphere, the approximate size of a baby's head. Guardrails should be designed so as not to encourage young children to attempt to climb over them. Specifically, CPSC recommends a picket fence guardrail design with no more than four inches between pickets. Such spacing helps prevent a small child from slipping between the bars and discourages climbing.

If the in-fill guardrail members allow footholds, CPSC says to limit the maximum openings to 1.75 inches. Where visibility would not be significantly impaired, the publication recommends solid members.

The recommendations call for the use of guardrails on the back of bleachers. Guardrails should protect bleachers at heights above 30 inches. The top of the guardrail should be at least 42 inches above the leading edge of the adjacent footboard, seat board or aisle.

The CPSC's recommendations are intended to prevent people from falling off of bleachers. Another set of recommendations prevents people from falling through. In this area, recommendations address the open deck design of older bleachers. CPSC recommends the addition of risers in the spaces below the seat boards and above the footboards. The riser should close off enough of the opening in the deck to prevent the passage of a four-inch sphere.

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People may also fall and injure themselves while walking on bleachers. CPSC says such falls are likely to occur when there are missing or inadequate bleacher components to assist in access and egress, such as aisles and handrails. Non-skid surfaces also help people to keep their footing.

As a rule, new bleachers comply with CPSC guidelines as well as regulations disseminated by local, state and nationally recognized building codes.

Inspecting Your Bleachers

There are many older bleachers in use that may require repair or replacement. The only way to identify them is through inspection.

CPSC recommends and the National Fire Protection Association requires that bleachers be thoroughly inspected at least quarterly by trained personnel, and that any problems be corrected immediately. These groups also say that a licensed design professional should inspect bleachers at least every two years and provide written certification that the bleachers are fit for use.

Records of inspection as well as records of all incidents and injuries should be retained.

To Repair, Replace or Eliminate?

Once adequate inspections are performed and proper evaluations documented, there comes a time when a decision has to be made whether to repair, replace or possibly eliminate older bleachers.

As mentioned previously, bleachers present a large exposure with the amount and variety of traffic to which many are subjected. That is an important consideration to take into account when weighing the cost impact of repair or replacement vs. the potentially insurmountable cost of a major bleacher-related incident and its impact on the school system's reputation.

When this comparison is made the answer to the question should be obvious.

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