

Inflatable water balls

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Purpose

The purpose of this alert is to inform owners and operators of inflatable water balls of the possible risks with their use. This alert also provides some information on risk control measures.

Background

Inflatable water balls are being introduced into Australia. Patrons are enclosed inside the inflatable water balls, which are sealed and inflated through the zip like mechanism after the patron enters. These devices can also be known as "water walkers", "hamster balls" and other names.

Currently, there is no applicable Australian Standard that specifically covers the design of these devices. *AS 3533.4.1-2005: Land-borne inflatable devices* does not apply to inflatable water balls as they are used over the water.



Photograph 1 - Inflatable water balls in use

The risks

Following are some of the identified risks to patrons associated with the use of inflatable water balls (balls). Patrons could:

- be suffocated or drowned in deep water (especially a young child) if the ball bursts or deflates suddenly without adequate supervision
- suffer from heat-related stress when using the ball in warm weather conditions for an extended period
- experience loss of oxygen if remaining in the ball for an extended period
- sustain body injuries as a result of collision with other patrons or the side wall of the pool.

Control measures

Where these balls are used, suitable control measures should be in place to prevent injuries, including the risk of asphyxiation and heat stress. Such measures should include:

- only using balls that have been manufactured from heavy duty material that is durable and resistant to degradation from ultraviolet light

- installing emergency stop buttons on or near the winch to immediately disengage the rotating parts.
- obtaining information from the manufacturer or supplier on the safe use of the balls
- only using the balls in shallow pools (e.g. no more than 400 mm deep)
- visually checking the balls before each use to ensure they are not damaged
- checking the pool and its vicinity to ensure there are no sharp objects that could possibly damage the ball and cause sudden deflation or cause injury to the patron inside
- positioning attendant(s) to provide rapid assistance to a patron should a ball deflate suddenly
- providing a system of emergency escape for a patron. The system should not rely solely on one attendant (i.e. in case the attendant is unable to provide immediate assistance)
- providing patrons with adequate information and instructions (such as the restriction of the patron's age and physical size; dress code; activity or behaviour controls and health requirements)
- adequately training the operators and providing them with safe operating instructions
- only allowing the balls to be used in suitable weather conditions
- strictly limiting the duration of use and releasing patrons quickly, to protect them from heat and reduced oxygen effects
- maintaining the balls in a clean and hygienic condition
- ensuring any cleaning agents used do not damage the balls or are hazardous to workers or patrons.

Routine maintenance

A competent person should be engaged to carry out periodical inspections of water balls at least annually, or as prescribed by the manufacturer, to ensure there is no significant degradation of the material, especially at the seams.

A record of service and maintenance checks should be kept in a logbook.

More information

Further information is available from www.worksafe.qld.gov.au or by calling the Workplace Health and Safety Infoline on 1300 369 915.

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