

BLEACHERS & GRANDSTANDS

Managing Hospitality Risk



WHAT'S AT RISK?

Not every hotel has facilities with bleacher seating, but for those who do, an active safety program is a must. Bleachers are structures that provide tiered or stepped seating, with or without backrests. They come in various configurations and sizes, and may be permanent or temporary. Guardrails may be missing from the backs or open sides of the bleachers. Openings between components in the seats and guardrails may be big enough to permit a child or a person to fall through. Bleachers may collapse if they are not installed or operated properly. This danger is particularly evidenced with telescopic/folding bleachers, portable/movable bleachers and temporary bleachers.

Between 1980 and 1999 an estimated annual average of 19,100 people were treated in U.S. hospital emergency rooms for bleacher related injuries. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) is aware of ten deaths that involved falls from bleachers from 1980 to 1999. Of these deaths, four involved children under age fifteen.

WHAT ARE YOUR LEGAL OBLIGATIONS?

On a federal level the Consumer Products Safety Commission has issued guidelines establishing bleacher safety standards for the production, erection and retrofitting of bleacher and grandstand facilities, as well as a requirement that local governments provide for regular inspections to assure that bleachers meet the structural requirements.

It is very important to know what state and local requirements apply, and that the hotel is fully compliant with existing law. In addition, it is crucial that maintenance standards be maintained. If bleachers are leased or rented for special events, the hotel must protect itself contractually by getting written assurances from the vendor that all equipment meets applicable standards, that the vendor accepts responsibility for the equipment, and that sufficient insurance is in place to protect the hotel.

HOW CAN YOU BETTER PROTECT YOUR ORGANIZATION?

For some suggestions designed to assist you in developing sound policies and procedures for your organization, please turn this document over and review the attached checklist.

For more information about this and other hospitality risk management topics, please contact:

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Checklist: Bleachers and Grandstands

- Children should not be able to pass under or through the components of a guardrail.
- Guardrails should be designed so that they do not encourage young children to climb on them.
- To prevent falls through bleacher components (such as the footboard, seat board and riser) that are above the ground: the openings should prevent passage of a four-inch sphere. This recommendation is based on data showing that 95% of children four months and older would be prevented from completely passing through a four-inch opening.
- Bleachers should be updated, inspected, maintained and certified as fit for use.
- Inspect bleachers for indications of damage, wear and misalignment prior to use.
- Provide routine inspection and maintenance, at least twice a year, in accordance with the owner's manual.
- Use only trained personnel to open and close bleachers following instructions provided in the owner's manual. **DO NOT ALLOW UNTRAINED PERSONNEL TO OPERATE BLEACHERS.**
- Install bleacher guardrails as a safety precaution and as an indication that the bleachers are fully extended.
- The top surface of the guardrail should be at least 42 inches above the leading edge of the footboard, seat board or aisle whichever is adjacent.
- When bleachers are used adjacent to a wall that is at least as high as the recommended guardrail height, the guardrail is not needed if a four-inch diameter sphere fails to pass between the bleachers and the wall.
- Any opening between components of the guardrail or under the guardrail should prevent passage of a four-inch sphere.
- Any opening between the components in the seating, such as between the footboard, seat board and riser should prevent passage of a four-inch diameter sphere where the footboard is 30 inches or more above the ground and where the opening would permit a fall of 30 inches or more.

CPSC SAFETY GUIDELINES TO RETROFIT BLEACHERS (Note: these are NOT mandatory standards.)

- Guardrails should be present on the backs and portions of the open ends of bleachers where the toe footboard, seat board or aisle is 30 inches or more above the ground. Bleachers with the top row nominally 30 inches above ground may be exempt from this recommendation.
- The preferable guardrail design uses only vertical members as in-fill between the top and bottom rails. If there are openings in the in-fill that could provide a foothold for climbing, the widest measurement of the opening where the foot could rest should be limited to a maximum of 1.75 inches. Opening patterns that provide a ladder effect should be avoided. If chain link fencing is used on guardrails, it should have a mesh size of 1.25-inch square or less.
- Aisles, handrails, non-skid surfaces and other items that assist in access and egress on bleachers should be incorporated into any retrofit project where feasible.
- A licensed professional engineer, registered architect or company that is qualified to provide bleacher products and services should inspect the bleachers at least every two years and provide a written certification that the bleachers are fit for use. CPSC recommends consulting local building officials to determine if permits are required and the use of licensed professionals to complete needed work.