

PIPA Essential Reading - Frequently Asked Questions



What is PIPA?

PIPA is an inspection scheme set up by the inflatable play industry to ensure that children's inflatable play equipment conforms to recognised standards. All four of the industry's trade associations have co-operated in setting up the scheme and it is wholeheartedly supported by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) who were consulted at every stage of the scheme's development.

Why do we need a scheme?

While inflatable play is normally a very safe and good way for children to exercise whilst having fun, poorly designed or badly worn equipment can increase the risk of injury to users.

Under the Health and Safety at Work Act manufacturers, hirers, operators and users have a responsibility to ensure minimum risk. Clearly that risk is more easily managed if the equipment conforms to accepted standards. PIPA provides a means for everyone in the supply chain to know that the equipment itself is safe, both on initial use and throughout its life.

BS EN 14960:2006, the European standard that most manufacturers and some operators now work to, is the standard to which inflatable play equipment is tested through the PIPA scheme. British Standards are not the law but following them is regarded as "best practice" and would usually be sufficient to demonstrate compliance with the Health & Safety at Work Act. The HSE cited BS EN 14960:2006 in a successful prosecution in May 2009.

How does the scheme work?

Each piece of conforming equipment supplied by a reputable manufacturer or importer is "tagged" with a unique number which stays with the inflatable throughout its life. When an inflatable that was manufactured prior to PIPA being set up comes into the system for annual test, it too, is tagged in a similar manner.

The tag number is logged into a central database where the results of its initial test and subsequent annual tests are recorded.

All users have access to the PIPA database via the Internet (www.pipa.org.uk) and can therefore check on the inspection status of any tagged equipment 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. In addition a certificate is issued with each test.

What if my inflatable has no tag?

As the scheme was first implemented on the 1st September 2004 and because every inflatable must, under PUWER regulations, be inspected annually then all PIPA inspected equipment will be tagged. If yours has no tag then you should check its inspection status with the supplier.

Only inspectors operating under either PIPA or the Amusement Device Inspection Procedures Scheme (ADIPS) are recognised by the HSE. PIPA is the only scheme which covers inflatables exclusively, all its inspectors are registered with the Register of Play Inspectors International (RPII), and the scheme is recognised as supporting best practice in safety.

There are a number of inspectors operating nationally who are not registered with either scheme. While they may test inflatables to the recognised standard BS EN 14960, their credentials are not supported by an independent body. To highlight the risk of using unaccredited inspectors, in May 2009 one such inspector pleaded guilty to charges of breaching section 3(2) of the Health and Safety at Work Act after the HSE discovered that they had passed faulty equipment.

If the inflatable is tagged and I have checked that the test record is current does that mean everything is safe?

No, the PIPA certificate says only that it was safe to use at the time of test. It should still be checked for damage before each use, and in any case you should be aware that three elements make for a safe inflatable play environment:

- Properly manufactured and maintained equipment.
- Correct operation (pressure, siting, anchorage etc.) of the equipment.
- Supervision

The PIPA scheme is designed to cover only the first of these; the operator and user are responsible for the remainder.

How was PIPA established?

One of the main reasons behind the drive to establish PIPA was the recognition by the inflatable play industry that people's safety and health - not to mention its own reputation - could be put at risk by a small number of rogue companies who were willing to cut corners and safety standards in search of quick profit.

PIPA should eventually eliminate such traders by providing users and authorities with a simple way of identifying the professional companies who recognise the vital importance of users' safety and place the highest priority on it.

The scheme was set up by all the trade organisations involved in the industry, and is coordinated by MUTA, which represents the technical textiles industry including manufacturers and operators of inflatable play equipment. MUTA has worked closely with the Inflatable Play Manufacturers Association (IPMA) as well as trade associations representing operators and hirers to develop the scheme.

What does PIPA stand for?

PIPA stands for Pertexa Inflatable Play Accreditation. PIPA was established when MUTA was known as Pertexa.

What should I check for?

Check that any inflatable that you are offered for sale or hire has a PIPA tag attached and ask to see the current test certificate. If the certificate is not available you can check the test status of any tagged equipment by visiting <http://www.pipa.org.uk/findTag.asp> and entering the tag number.

Ask the supplier for instructions as to safe use and to confirm that required daily checks have been carried out.

Remember that, unless you have made other arrangements, supervision of children on and around the equipment is your responsibility.

Where in the law does it say that inflatables must have annual tests?

Sections 6.1 and 53.1 of Part I of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974.
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/legislation/hswa.pdf> (pages 7 and 85)

Sections 5 and 6 of the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998:
<http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si1998/19982306.htm#5>

The HSE published this press statement following the May 2009 prosecution:
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/press/2009/coiwm41109.htm>

The HSE has endorsed this information sheet available on the PIPA website:
<http://www.pipa.org.uk/publicBestPractice.pdf>