

Working on indoor play standards and planning a code of practice for the industry

The indoor play industry has certainly come a long way in a decade. Back in 1990 no independent safety guidelines for indoor play had been written and a British or European standard seemed decades away. The only indoor play facilities were run by pub chains but then a concept that had began in children's hospitals started to interest the commercial sector and indoor play centres began to spring across the country.

The prospect was enticing: all round adventure play and entertainment for children, without the subjections of the British weather and also the perfect venue for children's parties and perhaps most importantly exercise for a generation obsessed with computers and video games. The industry has therefore developed rapidly since the nineties and especially over the past 3 years or so, where the powerful emergence of independent operators and brands has developed indoor play into a safety conscious, service orientated sector of the leisure industry. With this new found status as market leader, comes a big responsibility to raise and develop standards and this is why last year the Play Providers Association (PPA) was formed to promote and develop play operators.

One of the first tasks for the PPA members was to give their feedback as operators into the draft European Indoor Standard which is scheduled to replace the previous BS8409 document Soft Indoor play areas - Code of practice. Being a European standard this document will supersede the British document however as with any standard, it is not mandatory to adhere to, but it will strengthen an operators position in the instance of litigation, if you can prove that you conform to the appropriate industry standards. This European standard was written by play manufacturers and industry experts and now comments have been gathered from organisations, Europe wide, before the standard will take effect probably late in 2008.

Play Providers Association members see a clear need to accompany this European Standard with their own operational code of practice. The purpose of creating a industry code is to help play operators to maintain a base level of practice to ensure the safety and enjoyment of their customers. Members hope that by taking a professional and responsible approach to safety; that this will be recognised by consumers and eventually customers will only take their children to centres that abide by the PPA's code of practice. At the same time this safety stamp will undoubtedly improve the standing of indoor play operators within the leisure sector. Where previously many parents dreaded taking their children to a play centre because it was a dark and smelly building that served terrible coffee - the PPA members today have built centres which are clean and fresh and offer a high quality service to both adults and children alike. Whilst children play actively on the challenging play structures and the many other various activities on offer, parents can relax in comfortable surroundings, surf the net, watch TV and chat to their parents.

The Play Providers Association is keen to introduce a code of practice into their industry to raise the level of operation and send a strong message to their customers and the government and other regulatory bodies that indoor play is a professional industry which takes its duty of care very seriously. In many ways the members are trying to replicate the impact that the Fitness Industry Association's Code of Practice had in the early nineties in terms of facilitating growth and acting as a benchmark to operate at.

PPA member Creepy Crawlies in York commented "It is great to be a part of our recognised trade body and in association alongside other operators who share the same vision, to make the PPA the vehicle to drive towards quality in the play industry. The PPA is the ideal forum to share our thoughts and problems and look to solve them collectively as an industry. The PPA is very much the future of our industry"

For more information about joining the PPA please use the Reader Enquiry System.

PPA - Reader Enquiry: 73

