

BLEACHERS & GRANDSTANDS BEST PRACTICES

Bleachers are used for viewing sporting events, graduations, parades, and other activities. Unfortunately, thousands of young children are seriously injured in falls from them each year. Bleachers should be as safe as possible.

Bleachers are categorized into different types depending on the facilities where they are utilized:

- Permanent / Stationary
- Portable / Movable
- Telescopic/Folding
- Temporary

When assessing fall protection requirements, bleachers fall into two other categories. Those meeting the standards for fall protection and those outdated (to be considered for upgrade) or retrofitted to meet current standards through retrofitting or replacement.

There are two guidance documents for assessing compliance with bleacher standards:

- [Grandstands and Spectator Bleachers: CPSC Retrofitting Bleachers](#)
- [ICC 300-2017 Chapter 5 Bleachers Book](#)

The International Building Code (IBC) adopted by New Jersey references the ICC 300-2017 Chapter 5 in new bleacher installations but not for retrofitting existing bleachers for renovations. However, facility stakeholders may consider using ICC 300-2017 Chapter 5 as best practices.

This ICC Standard addresses the unique concerns associated with bleacher seating. It handles new and existing installations of all types of bleacher seating, including fixed and folding bleachers intended for indoor, outdoor, temporary, and permanent use—this Standard wants to coordinate with the means of egress systems in the building codes.

NEW JERSEY-SPECIFIC REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS

Frequent interim inspections can prevent incidents that place the municipality at risk. Identifying bleacher safety hazards easily is the best way to keep your bleachers in good condition. During your inspections, look for the following:

- Loose or missing hardware for cross-braces and frame connections
- Cracked or broken welds
- Solid anchoring or attachment to ground surfaces
- Bent or warped benches
- Sharp edges from damage
- Missing or damaged safety end caps
- Rust and signs of environmental stressors

[Inspection Checklists](#) includes a Bleacher Inspection Checklist.

New Jersey Adopted Standard

New Jersey has formally adopted ICC 300-2017 with state-specific amendments as the New Jersey Standard on Bleachers, Folding and Telescopic Seating, and Grandstands 2017 (N.J.A.C. 5:23). This is distinct from the base ICC 300-2017 standard and may include requirements beyond the national model code. All bleacher installations in New Jersey must comply with this NJ-specific adopted version.

Recommendation: Assess all existing bleachers against CPSC retrofitting guidelines now, ahead of potential regulatory requirements.

Existing Bleacher Compliance Gap

The NJ Uniform Construction Code (UCC) currently applies bleacher safety standards to new installations only and does not require retrofitting of existing bleachers. This gap creates a potential liability exposure for older, non-compliant bleachers even where current law does not yet mandate upgrades. Facility owners should proactively evaluate existing bleachers and prioritize retrofitting or replacement where safety deficiencies are identified.

GUARDRAIL & OPENING REQUIREMENTS (CPSC)

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) Guidelines for Retrofitting Bleachers provide the following specific requirements that should be incorporated into all bleacher assessments and retrofits:

Guardrails:

- Guardrails are required on the backs and open ends of bleachers where the footboard, seatboard, or aisle is 30 inches or more above the ground.
- The top surface of the guardrail must be at least 42 inches above the leading edge of the footboard, seatboard, or aisle.
- When bleachers are adjacent to a wall at least as high as the required guardrail height, a guardrail is not needed if a 4-inch diameter sphere cannot pass between the bleachers and the wall.
- All openings in guardrails must prevent passage of a 4-inch diameter sphere.
- The preferred guardrail design uses only vertical members as infill between top and bottom rails; any openings that could serve as footholds must be no wider than 1.75 inches — ladder-like patterns should be avoided.
- If chain-link fencing is used on guardrails, mesh size must be 1.25 inches square or smaller.

Openings Between Seating Components:

- Openings between seating components (footboard, seatboard, and riser) must prevent passage of a 4-inch diameter sphere where the surface is 30 inches or more above the ground and where the opening would permit a fall of 30 inches or more.

Additional Best Practices

Comprehensive Bleacher Inventory & Assessment

Conduct a formal inventory of all bleacher assets, documenting:

- Location, construction type, age, photos, and number of rows
- Whether each unit meets current standards or requires retrofitting or replacement
- Structural integrity assessment by a qualified engineer for older or structurally suspect units

Inspection Documentation & Frequency

- Formally document all inspections with date, inspector name, findings, and corrective actions taken.
- Conduct inspections at minimum before the season, mid-season, and after the season, plus after severe weather events.
- Use trained personnel for inspections; consider formal inspector training programs.
- Maintain a corrective action log to track identified hazards through to resolution.

Crowd Load & Structural Capacity

- Post maximum occupancy and load capacity on all bleacher units
- Ensure bleachers are not overloaded during high-attendance events
- Account for sway and partial loading per ICC 300-2017 load combination requirements

Identification Tags

ICC 300-2017 requires identification tags on bleachers that include installation and inspection information. Verify all bleacher units have compliant identification tags and add tag verification to the routine inspection checklist.

Temporary & Portable Bleacher Controls

Temporary and portable bleachers present unique risks and require additional controls:

- Verify proper setup and leveling on stable ground before each use
- Confirm anchoring and stabilization per manufacturer specifications
- Inspect for damage after each transport and setup cycle
- Ensure compliance with ICC 300-2017 even for temporary installations
- Do not exceed the manufacturer's rated capacity