

Aquatics Play Structures
Operational Practices and Procedures Guidance
***The Blob* and other inflated catapult devices**

The Operational Practices and Procedures Guidance should be applied in conjunction with the BSA's Aquatics Play Structure Policy that can be found in the Aquatics Safety section of the Guide to Safe Scouting.

1. Description

The Blob and *The Water Blob* are registered trademarks for a large sausage-shaped, sealed inflated rubber bladder with a vinyl shell. See www.the-blob.com for manufacturer recommendations. Similar products, such as the *Katapult Blob* are available from other manufacturers and may have only a single PVC bladder. Procedures focused on *The Blob* are discussed first, followed by notes on similar devices.



A “blobbee” kneels near the far end of the bladder. A “blobber” jumps feet first from a fixed platform and lands rump first on the near end of the bladder. That action propels the blobbee into the air with a subsequent water entry. The blobber then crawls along the bladder to become the next blobbee and the action is repeated.



2. Typical risks of the Activity

- a. Injuries from awkward impact with the bladder or the water from a height
- b. Falls from a fixed tower onto the deck
- c. Bouncing back into a fixed tower after jumping
- d. Participants caught between the shell and the bladder when the shell is torn
- e. Electrical shock if electrical air pumps are used for inflation
- f. Injury or drowning from unauthorized or poorly supervised use

3. Safety considerations during installation

- a. Water Depth – because water entry is from a height, water depth around the blob should be eight to 10 feet deep.
- b. Distance from other objects – A “safe landing zone” should be established in an arc around both the near end to the platform and the far end. Safe clearance will depend on the actual device and should be established based on experience. Floats may be needed to define the area if the lake is shared with other activities such as boating. Do not place buoyed boundary lines near enough for participants to land on.
- c. Anchor Lines – anchor lines should be vertical or angled underneath the float such that they do not pose hazards for participants catapulted from the end or sliding off the side.
- d. Tower Height - *The Blob* manufacturer recommends a platform height of fifteen feet for a standard sized blob adjusted to the age of the participants. For Boy Scouts, a height of twelve feet above the water is appropriate. That will result in a drop from the platform to a standard sized blob of six to seven feet.
- e. Platform Overlap – The platform should be cantilevered over the blob so that the jumper lands far enough from the end not to bounce back toward the tower without needing to take a running leap. The amount of overlap depends on the actual device but is typically around 5 feet.

- f. Tower Plans and Construction - Rigid towers constructed for the elevated entry platform must be professionally designed, approved and inspected by engineers/architects in accord with codes concerning ladders and rails. Specifications should include the maximum safe load for the platform.

4. Safety Check Items

- a. Inflation - Over inflation can result in jumpers bouncing off, difficulty in moving from one end to the other, and blobbees catapulted too high. Under inflation can also result in excessive bounce heights as well as participants falling into each other in a cavity. Inflation pressure can vary with air temperature and therefore should be checked at the beginning of the activity, monitored continuously based on participant/blob reactions, and adjusted accordingly.
- b. Maintenance - Prior to each activity session, check at least the following in addition to inflation pressure and discontinue use if necessary until repairs are made:
 - i) integrity of the shell – no tears in the lining allowed
 - ii) anchor fastenings
 - iii) ladder and platform stability
 - iv) surface of the platform for slippery conditions or splinters

5. Safety considerations in conducting the Activity

- a. Rules and procedures are explained to participants prior to the activity.
- b. All participants should pass the BSA swimmer classification
- c. All participants should wear properly fitted approved lifejackets. Those designed and reinforced for PWC, water skiing, or other impact activities are preferred.
- d. Buddies should be approximately the same weight (within 50 lbs).
- e. No one enters the water except as directed.
- f. No one has to jump – it is OK to decline after reaching the edge
- g. Jumping is done from a standing position at the edge of the platform – no running jumps.
- h. Jumpers should land bottom first.
- i. Jumpers then crawl close to the far end (designate where with a mark or reference to a color zone) and kneel.
- j. Blobbees should try to land in the water feet first. Flips and other gymnastic moves are not allowed.
- k. Those bounced from the blob or sliding off it immediately swim to a designated staging point, swimming around the far end of the blob if necessary and not swimming under the blob or the tower structure. At the staging point, they exit the water and wait for their buddy before exiting the area or getting back in line.
- l. A procedure is in place to order participants by weight since weight differentials exceeding 50 lbs can result in excessive bounce heights. Typically the ordering is done as participants are sent to the base of the ladder to the platform, but may be done on a large elevated deck from which jumping is done.
- m. A staff member at the edge of the platform does the following:
 - i. Maintains discipline on the tower, ensuring that no one jumps anywhere but on the blob and only on command
 - ii. Watches the jumper hit the blob and activates the EAP if the person experiences difficulty.
 - iii. Watches as the jumper crawls to the far end and verbally confirms that the person is ready to be bounced into the air. Participants may be directed to raise their arm in response to the query “Blobbee, ready?”
 - iv. Confirms with a lifeguard watching the end of the blob that the landing area is clear

- v. Checks that the lifejacket of the next jumper is properly fastened, that the jumper has an appropriate weight, and is ready.
- vi. Loudly states “Jumping” as the signal to the jumper, the blobbee, and lifeguards that the process has started.
- vii. If a prospective jumper decides not to jump, the staff member on the tower temporary halts the activity as necessary to make sure that person gets back to the deck safely.
- n. At least one lifeguard is positioned off the end of the blob to monitor those in the water. A board or sit-on-top kayak makes a good station.
- o. Note that the above list is for guidance and will need adaptation to local situations.

6. Emergency Action Plan Considerations

- a. Safely removing participants off the tower in case of inclement weather or an emergency
- b. Spinal injury management with the subject wearing a lifejacket
- c. Cutting electrical power during inflation.

7. Prohibited Practices

- a. No double or triple jumping or bouncing, even if weights match.
- b. Exceptions to the rules for staff-only use

8. Similar Devices

Other configurations use a climbing device with a slide (small iceberg) or a trampoline rather than a fixed platform. Refer to separate operational practices for each device. Adapt *The Blob* guidelines to ensure controlled use, continuous surveillance of everyone on the device or in the water, reasonable bounce heights, and a clear landing zone.

