ARENA NETTING

What To Look For When Considering Netting For Your Arena

By

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A number of high profile spectator injuries have brought the issue of arena spectator shielding and protective safety netting to prominence. Although relatively few in number the incidents usually capture the attention of the media and become highly publicized.

Netting was typically been used to keep the puck in the rink and protect arena end walls and score clocks, with spectator protection often given little consideration. However publicity over injuries is causing facility operators to review their netting requirements with a new emphasis on protecting the spectator.

Impaired visibility has usually been the argument against placing netting in front of the spectator areas. Many fans agree with this, and suggest that pucks leaving the ice surface are as much a part of the game as baseball's home runs being hit out of the park. The considerable difference in the time and speed in which the puck and a ball leave the area of play make this an awkward comparison.

The potential of lawsuits resulting from spectator injury is having an impact, and we are starting to see netting surrounding the entire dasher system, from the top of the glass to the roof line. This protects both the seating and public areas from flying pucks and balls.

Part of the difficulty in getting arenas to review their netting requirements has been the lack of direction on the topic. Although a number of provincial, state, and sport organizations have developed "guidelines" or "recommendations" of their own, there are inconsistencies between associations and these guidelines have often lacked authority or recognition. In Canada, the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) has prepared guidelines which may help to clarify the issue on a national basis.

The release of CAN/CSA-Z262.7-04 "Guidelines For Spectator Safety In Indoor Arenas" now provides facility operators a reference from which to develop their netting requirements. Basically, the guideline calls for a combination of boards, shielding and netting to protect arena spectators and non participants from being hit by a puck, ball, or object when traveling in a direct line from the playing area.

Some items in the guidelines may require interpretation, and concerns such as site lines, visibility, playability, player safety, and building protection are left to other bodies, codes, or the facility operator. Please feel free to contact us for a more detailed explanation.

The “guideline” makes it important that facility operators now include netting as part of their facility evaluation, and educate themselves on the types of materials available, as well as the different areas of protection and methods of installation in their markets.

There are several different types and colors of netting available. Typically for ice arenas, clear monofilament, and black or white nylon are the most common. Specifications vary, but generally you should look for netting with a twine thickness of 1mm to 2.2mm, a mesh size of 1 ½” diamond or square, and minimum break strength between 95 and 160 pounds. Netting that does not meet or exceed these tolerances should not be considered for use in an arena. In addition, netting can be UV stabilized, an important consideration for outdoor or direct sunlight applications, and treated with a non reflective coating and/or additional fire retardants.

photo courtesy of Sport Systems Unlimited Corp.

Growing demand for netting is bringing some new colors such as blue and gray, as well as different materials such as Kevlar and improved twine strengths are finding their way into the market. When considering these new products, be certain that the product has been properly tested to meet appropriate break and strength requirements, and that the material does not stretch to allow puck penetration. Ask to see the product specifications and test results before ordering.

Pricing for the different netting materials can range between $0.50 and $1.25 per square foot. Additional items required for the installation such as conduit, cable, and hardware will add to the price.

Installation costs can vary substantially with location, roof and beam design, the different types of facilities, ceiling heights, the methods of suspension, and how it is attached to the shields. Other issues could be created by the location of heaters, lighting, sound equipment, and dehumidification units.

Some netting can cause problems with digital television cameras. This is particularly true of the clear monofilament netting which is often invisible to the eye but reflects light that the cameras may pick up as a distorted image. Regardless of what color of netting you are considering, the reflective factor should be considered and properly addressed for facilities where TV cameras may be used.

Whether installing netting in a new or existing facility, you should carefully consider all aspects of the project. Protection of the building and non participants, portability requirements, aesthetics, proximity to overhead heaters, and budgets, as well as spectator viewing and protection all need to be reviewed prior to installation.

photo courtesy of Accent Refrigeration Systems.

When considering spectator viewing and protection, you may want to look at increasing the height of the shielding in the spectator areas as part of the netting project. Although netting is very economical in comparison to tempered or acrylic shielding, placing netting seams and borders directly in the viewing line of your best seating may generate numerous complaints from the fans. And installing netting too low and easily accessible can actually be more expensive than increasing shield heights, as annoyed patrons can be the source of regular vandalism resulting in continuing repairs and increased maintenance costs.

There are several ways to install protective safety netting, however in all cases it should be installed so that there are no gaps between the top of the shielding and the bottom of the net. The netting should be ordered to the precise size of the area to be covered, and the installation should be pulled snug but not too tight, as over stretching of the net reduces the material strength and enlarges the mesh opening, making it more susceptible to damage and penetration. It is always a good idea to have your netting professionally installed by an authorized dealer, but if this is not possible it is important that you carefully follow the manufacturer's installation instructions.

As the use of netting continues to increase, access and portability will become a bigger factor. This can be accomplished by simply unhooking the netting from the shields and manually raising and tying it up, or by incorporating curtain style tracking for pulling the netting aside. Electric lifts can also be used to raise and lower the netting from a ceiling mounted lift system, however, these features can be expensive, and are usually considered only for multi purpose high use facilities.

Netting requires regular inspection, with immediate repairs being made to any damaged ties or materials. Netting twine may break down with use and age or be damaged by vandalism, making the occasional replacement of the entire net a necessary consideration.

Spectator demand, liability, and insurance requirements will continue to focus attention on the arena netting issue. Becoming knowledgeable on the issue before thoroughly evaluating your facility will allow you to address your spectator and building netting requirements in a safe and effective manner.

Additional information regarding specifications, and pricing for the various types of netting and installation methods can be obtained from your dasher supplier, or by contacting us at the address below.

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