

## MAINTAINING & INSPECTING YOUR NETTING IS JUST GOOD BUSINESS

BY QUINN MCKENNA



Some wear and tear on netting should be expected, but careful inspection will allow for timely repairs and replacement.

**AT INCORD PLAY**, we have been producing custom netting and rope components for waterparks, amusement parks and attraction crafters for more than twenty years. Since we've seen just about everything over the years, we understand the value of keeping your park in top notch condition and we know that the costs can add up fast when something goes wrong. That's why we want to share our knowledge with you on how to spot and mitigate problems to help you get the most out of your netting investment.

Waterpark netting is subjected to multiple sources of wear throughout a normal operating day. Several natural and use-based factors contribute to the degradation of netting and cordage fibers. As an operator, you can't keep these elements away from netting, but there are ways of dealing with these forces to extend the product's life and identify damage before it becomes a problem.

### EVALUATING THE CLIMATE FACTORS & REACTING APPROPRIATELY

Netting and cordage have a finite lifespan, with the end of that lifespan accelerated depending on several factors which are mostly climate-dependent. For example, the farther south a park is located, the better the weather, which means more sunlight exposure and greater use due to longer seasons and sometimes year-round operation. In other words, netting in Texas will wear out a lot faster than netting in Pennsylvania.

The biggest everyday contributor to destruction is the constant bombardment of ultraviolet rays from the sun. For aesthetic netting like fencing and theming components, the result is faded colors from the breakdown of color dyes. Over several years, UV rays can break down a material

to the point of weakening it, which is a concern for interactive components like cargos and barrier nets.

When evaluating significant UV damage, besides fading colors, you should look for signs of tiny bits of fibers shedding onto hands and surfaces. This is caused by the fibers becoming brittle and breaking when the netting or rope is moved or handled. If you see signs of shedding of fibers, then you should definitely think about replacement at that point.

Contaminants including sand, dirt, rust and air pollution also work to break down these materials. Whether carried on hands and feet or wind-blown onto surfaces, contaminants which make their way into the fibers of netting or rope create friction and abrasion, cutting the fibers and speeding up deterioration. This concern is greatest for interactive components which experience constant movement and weight-loading, causing more friction.

To help limit the damage caused by harmful contaminants, you should regularly hose down the netting. Flushing the fibers with water and clearing out the contaminants can extend the life of your netting. This flushing includes metal hardware components of the netting attachments, which usually have some limited movement.

### MONITORING COMMON WEAR AND TEAR PATTERNS

Nets should be attached evenly, allowing for equal transmission of force from the net to the hardware. Uneven attachment can place higher stress on components, resulting in uneven wear and eventual failure of hardware or the net and border. Be sure lashing is tight and continuous, and that hardware attachments are taking an even weight load without play.

Cargo walks and ramps can develop sag over time from guest traffic. Too much sag can allow the net to contact the structure or other objects creating wear. If the attraction is popular, then kids will be playing on it, causing it to wear a lot faster.

These nets can be tightened back to tension by taking in a mesh on one side and lashing it to the bar. This can be done over the original lashing without the need to remove it. InCord Play supplies lashing cord and instructions making it possible to do it yourself.

Normal day to day use creates different kinds of wear, some of which is expected. Other times, netting deterioration could be found in very specific



Sand abrasion and UV degradation are two factors that can damage netting.

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locations where there is a greater amount of physical contact with the netting.

I have found some common wear patterns based on typical guest behavior. For example, any fence around an attraction where parents are watching their kids play gets worn from parents leaning on the fencing or resting their foot in the fencing, creating a hole.

Holes in fencing or barrier netting can develop from excess wear or vandalism. Repairing a small hole or broken mesh can be an easy fix by taking in a mesh on each side and mending it with thread while larger holes may be patched. Consult InCord Play or your netting provider for instruction and evaluation of this type of damage.

### CONDUCTING REGULAR INSPECTIONS

Regular inspections of your netting can help you spot trouble before it becomes a problem. Make a list of all netting elements in your park. Walk around all of them and inspect for key signs of wear. Take pictures of the netting so you track wear progress and aid in the reorder process.

When inspecting your netting, take your time and go through a checklist, usually in the form of a signed and dated maintenance log. Look for fraying, mesh breaks, excessive sag and netting separating from the border. Check lashing for cuts which could cause it to unravel.

Check all hardware for rust, loose connections and functionality. Missing or damaged hardware should only be replaced with hardware approved by the netting supplier. Using poor substitute hardware could affect the safety and reliability of the system and could void warranties.

If excessive damage to netting or hardware is found, or you're not sure, photograph the affected area and send it in along with a detailed description for professional evaluation. Most netting providers will examine it and advise the next course of action.

When it comes to reordering, knowing your netting is important. Keep all of the information you have on your netting because it's going to help you in the future. Having as much information on hand as possible when replacement is necessary can help speed up the reordering process and reduce the risk of error, which can get you back up and running sooner.

At InCord Play, we offer a site survey service where an InCord Field Service Representative will conduct an in-person inspection of your park's netting. We then compile the data into an organized reference guide of your park's netting for you to keep. The report includes a photo, description, materials and estimated replacement cost for each netting element. Other providers might offer similar services, so make sure you look into those options.

The key is to maintain your nets and don't wait until the last minute to replace them. Keeping up with your park's netting not only looks good, it also keeps guests safe and prevents safety shutdowns. No one wants to disappoint guests by having a popular attraction shutdown for maintenance repairs. Plus, emergency expedited net replacement can also be quite a bit costlier.

Remember, the more knowledgeable you are about your netting, the longer your netting will last, which allows you to plan for replacement in a responsible timeframe.

This helps give your park a high rating and keeps guests coming back. •



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- Walking Bridges
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