HAUNTED HOUSE & HAY RIDE LIABILITY

MANAGING THE SPOOKY RISKS OF HALLOWEEN

Do you operate a haunted house during the Halloween season? What about hay rides? Below is some information useful to any organization that is considering providing haunted amusement for the general public.

**Plan Ahead.** Risk to operating entities is greatly increased simply by opening this event to the public. Any time large numbers of people are involved planning is critical. Carefully plan the layout and emergency procedures in the early stages. Knowledge of appropriate building and fire codes is key.

**Know Appropriate Codes.** NFPA 101 3.3.25.8 Defines haunted houses as “a building that is temporary, permanent, or mobile that contains a device or system that conveys passengers or provides a walkway along, around or over a course in any direction as a form of amusement arranged so that the egress path is not readily apparent due to visual or audio distractions or an intentionally confounded egress path, or is not readily available due to mode of conveyance through the building or structure. Such structures include amusements such as haunted house, a roller coaster type ride within a building, a multilevel play structure within a building, a submarine ride, and similar amusements where the occupants are not in the open air.”

Requirements for Haunted Houses are covered in section NFPA 101 13.1.1 (Assembly Occupancies) and section 13.4.7 (Special Amusement Buildings). Here you will find requirements for sprinklers, temporary water supply, smoke detection, alarm initiation, alarm integration with illumination and sound interruption, egress and exit signs, and interior building materials.
**Involve the Fire Department.** The local fire authority has jurisdiction over enforcement of all applicable fire and life safety regulations. Fire department for approval of plans and issuance of permits should be strongly considered for regulation within local municipal policies, codes, or by-laws.

**Understand All Risks.** If you are having live performers scare participants, ensure appropriate background checks and establish protocol that ensures limited physical contact with or cause for injury to participants. If you are transporting participants in slow moving vehicles, such as animal-drawn wagons, clearly mark the path of travel and ensure the animal is not provoked along the way. Ensure smooth ways of travel to minimize bumps. Inspect the entire vehicle before each ride. Inspection should include the hitch, wheels, axles, guardrail/barriers of passenger compartment, exposure to protrusions in seating area, trash, and debris. And, don’t forget to take care of those animal droppings!

**Rules.** Clearly post and enforce rules for these and all recreational activities.

**Make Sure You’re Covered.** Depending on the type of equipment that you are providing, MIIA may or may not provide coverage. Please be sure to contact your Account Manager prior to hosting a haunted house or providing hay rides to review your options. Since most Towns do not “own” their own haunted house equipment (moonwalks) or hay wagons, you might consider obtaining a certificate of insurance from whom you rent this equipment.

*Contact the MIIA Loss Control Department with any questions at 1-800-882-1498.*