

Are Your Soccer Goals Safe???

The Consumer Products Safety Commission (CPSC) estimates that there are between 225,000 and 500,000 soccer goals in the United States. Many are unsafe because they are not properly anchored or stable. Injuries related to soccer goals fall into the following categories:

- Goals falling onto people who are moving the goals from one location to another.
- People falling from goals while climbing or hanging from goals or nets.
- Goals falling over on people who are pulling down on or climbing on crossbars.
- Injuries or fatalities occurring as a result of running into goal posts.
- Goals falling over as a result of high winds or wind gusts.
- Cuts/abrasions resulting from sharp edges or jagged metal or wood pieces protruding from goal posts.

As many as 27 deaths have been reported as a result of goals falling on people and an estimated 120 injuries are treated in hospital emergency rooms each year as the result of soccer goal related accidents. These are staggering figures published by the CPSC and substantiated by many insurance industry reports.

Examples of claims related to movable goals include:

- A boy in California suffered severe and permanent trauma to the head when he was knocked unconscious by a falling soccer goal. This player was moving the goal into place with his teammates at the time of injury.
- In 1999, a Pennsylvania boy was moving a portable soccer goal with the help of his Coach and other adult volunteers. In this instance, the goal posts fell apart and struck the boy in the head. He suffered serious fractures to his face and mouth.
- Children are not the only victims when it comes to portable soccer goals. After moving the soccer goal prior to the start of a recreational game in Oregon, a team father was hanging nets on the goal posts. The goal fell over and landed on the father's legs, fracturing several bones in his foot and ankle.

Wind claims also rank high in terms of severity of injury, and typically involve spectators.

- In 1995 in Pennsylvania, an adult spectator was injured when goal posts were blown over in a 20-mph wind, "not an unusually strong gust of wind". In Southern California in 1997, a young girl was injured while playing on her school's playground at recess when winds kicked up and blew the goal posts over. In both cases, the soccer associations were liable for damages due to their failure to properly secure the goals.

The attractive nuisance factor of soccer goals is the cause of many claims that are not directly related to soccer players or even to soccer activities. These usually happen when the goals are unattended. Children and adults alike climb on goal

posts, perform stretching exercises or warm-ups, or even use them to do pull ups or chin-ups. Goal posts “whether portable or permanent” are not designed for these purposes and traumatic claims can be the result:

- In 1993, an 11 year old California football player showed up early for practice and was playing around with his friends on a school district's permanently installed soccer goal. He fell from the crossbar and broke his neck. The boy was paralyzed from the neck down.
- A young boy participating in a YMCA extended daycare program was playing outside and climbed on a portable goal with his friends. The goal post fell over and fractured the boy's leg. The soccer association was held liable because they were responsible for maintaining the field, even though no soccer activities were going on at the time.

Claims during competition include these examples:

- Two separate, serious claims, one in 1998 and the other in 2000, both involved young players who ran into goal posts during a game. In each case, the legal complaint stated that the goal posts should have been padded. The claimants believed that their injuries would have been greatly minimized if the posts had been padded. Both players suffered facial injuries and broken teeth as a result of the impact.
- In 1995, a goalie from New York dove to block a shot on goal. The ball hit the side post on the goal. The goal was not commercially made, and was in poor shape. The impact of the ball caused the goal to collapse and the crossbar struck the goalie. She suffered serious head injury and lacerations to her scalp.

An example of a claim resulting from sharp edges or jagged pieces protruding from goals is a New Jersey girl who was playing soccer in 1998 and fell against the goal post. She cut her ear badly on the zip ties that were used to secure the nets.

So what can be done at the local level to reduce the threat posed by soccer goals?

For one, all clubs and associations need to educate those who will be on the fields and come in contact with goals, including players, their families and friends who watch the games, coaches, officials and team volunteers as a beginning.

How can this be done?

- Post signs or hand out flyers at registration on soccer goal safety.
- Include safety information in membership packets.
- Put soccer goal warning signs on every portable goal used by your organization.
- Add a safety information section to your club website or team website.
- Establish a safety committee to oversee goals and other potential hazards.

At a minimum, use the following as a basis for your safety guidelines concerning soccer goals:

- **NEVER** allow anyone to play or climb on the net or goal framework.
- Place safety warning labels on the goal posts and crossbar.

- Always use extreme caution when moving goals. Portable soccer goals should be moved by **adults** who are authorized and trained to do so. Allow for adequate manpower to move goals of varied sizes.
- Communicate with all of your teams and leagues, and instruct players (and spectators) of the potential dangers associated with moving or playing on portable goals.
- Physical guidelines for goal posts should cover the following, whether permanent or portable...
 - Design, construction and dimensions: make sure that the goals conform to the standards set by FIFA
 - For portable goals, your guidelines should specify how to anchor, secure or place counterweights on the goals to prevent tipping.
 - Portable goals should be anchored at all times, not just when teams are on the field.
 - Always remove nets when games or practices are not in session.
 - Check the structural integrity and proper connecting hardware before every use.
 - Use portable goals only on level surfaces, to prevent additional tipping hazards.

When goals are not in use, store them face-to-face and chain lock them together, or lock and chain them to a fixed structure such as a permanent fence. For goals that can be disassembled, fully disassemble them and store them in a secure storage area. Because padding will affect the way a ball reacts when it hits the goal, think about using padding on goals for recreational or younger teams to protect them. Older and ODP teams can play without padding. These are points you as a team, club or association should be thinking about. Nobody likes to see a player or spectator injured because we didn't do our homework.

Soccer Goal safety should be the primary concern of all clubs when soccer season begins. Other dangers on the pitch pale when you consider what could happen when a soccer goal falls or tips onto a player or spectator.

We need to make sure our goals are properly anchored/counterweighted. Moveable goals are much less likely to tip when they are properly anchored. So how do we make our goals safe, you ask? First, we need to understand a few terms in regard to a soccer goal, as illustrated in the Figure 1, below:

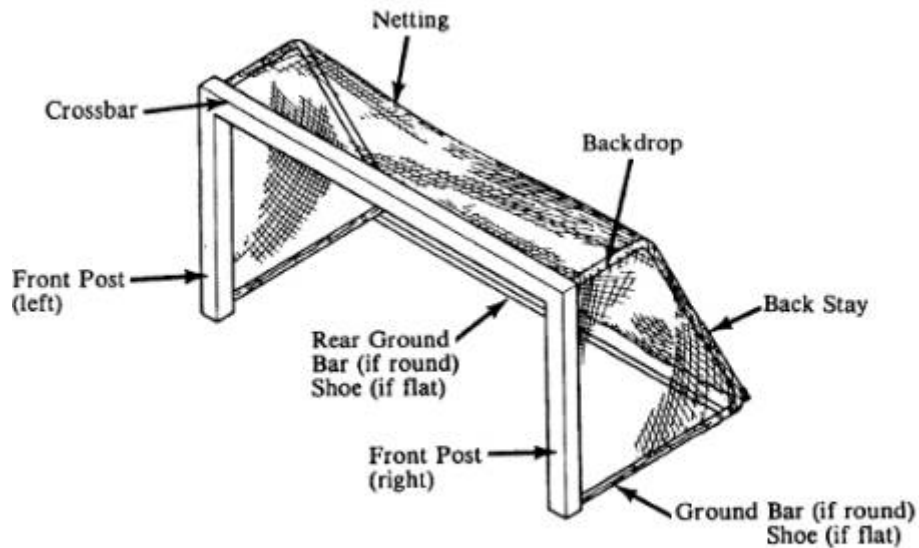


Figure 1: Components of a Movable Soccer Goal

A properly anchored/counterweighted movable soccer goal is much less likely to tip over.

Remember to secure the goal to the ground (preferably at the rear of the goal), making sure the anchors are flush with the ground and clearly visible. It is **IMPERATIVE** that **ALL** movable soccer goals are always anchored properly. There are several different ways to secure your soccer goal. The number and type of anchors to be used will depend on a number of factors, such as soil type, soil moisture content, and total goal weight.

Anchor Types:

Goal Anchoring

NOTE: There are other methods of anchoring available

1. Auger style

This style anchor is "helical" shaped and is screwed into the ground. A flange is positioned over the ground shoes (bar) and rear ground shoe (bar) to secure them to the ground. A minimum of two auger-style anchors (one on each side of the goal) are recommended. More may be required, depending on the manufacturer's specifications, the weight of the goal, and soil conditions.

2 Semi-permanent

This anchor type is usually comprised of two or more functional components. The main support requires a permanently secured base that is buried underground. One type of semi-permanent anchor connects the underground base to the soccer goal by means of 2 tethers. Another design utilizes a buried anchor tube with a threaded opening at ground level. The goal is positioned over the buried tube and the bolt is passed through the goal ground shoes (bar) and rear ground shoe (bar) and screwed into the threaded hole of the buried tube.

Semipermanent Anchor

Semipermanent Anchor

Peg or Stake Style Anchor



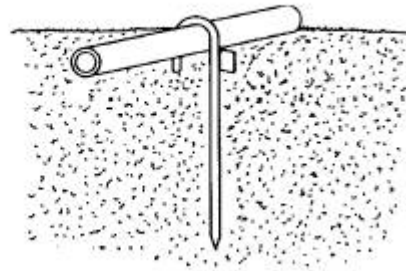
3 Peg or Stake style (varying lengths) Anchor

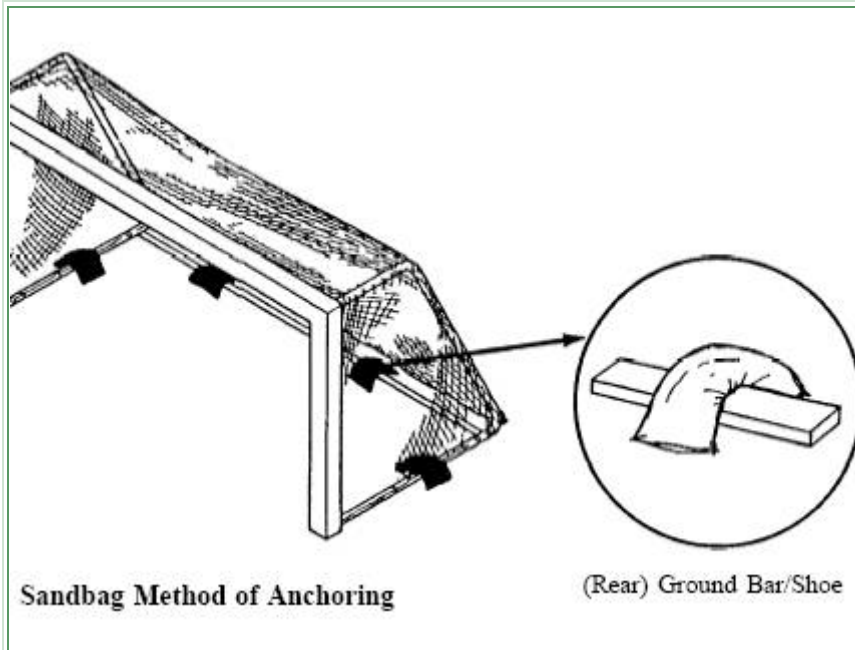
Typically two to four pegs or stakes are used per goal (more for heavier goals) . The normal length of a peg or stake is approximately 10 inches . Care should be taken when installing pegs or stakes. Pegs or stakes should be driven into the ground with a sledge-hammer as far as possible and at an angle if possible, through available holes in the ground shoes (bar) and rear ground shoe (bar) to secure them to the ground. If the peg or stake is not flush with the ground, it should be clearly visible to persons playing near the soccer goal. Stakes with larger diameters or textured surfaces have greater holding capacity.

4 J-Hook Shaped Stake style

This style is used when holes are not pre-drilled into the ground shoes (bars) or rear ground shoe (bar) of the goal. Similar to the peg or stake style, this anchor is hammered, at an angle if possible, directly into the earth. The curved (top) position of this anchor fits over the goal member to secure it to the ground. Typically, two to four stakes of this type are recommended (per goal), depending on stake structure, manufacturers specifications, weight of goal, and soil conditions. Stakes with larger diameters or textured surfaces have greater holding capacity.

J-Hook Anchor





5 Sandbags/Counterweights

Sandbags or other counterweights could be an effective alternative on hard surfaces, such as artificial turf, where the surface can not be penetrated by a conventional anchor (i. e., an indoor practice facility). The number of bags or weights needed will vary and must be adequate for the size and total weight of the goal being supported.

In addition to anchoring/counterweighting the goals, make sure you have warning signs posted on each goal as recommended by the Consumer Product Safety Commission. These can be obtained by contacting Don Mears, WSYSA Risk Management Director.

Another topic to address is "homemade" goals. Insurance Professionals agree about the liability a person might face if they were to construct goals for a soccer club. In general, anyone who makes goals for a soccer club would assume the same liability as any manufacturer would. For example, if a homemade goal were in use at a soccer game and the ball in hitting the goal caused the goal to collapse and a portion of the goal hit the goalie, the parent who manufactured the goal could be held liable as any manufacturer would be and thus could be involved in litigation.

The bottom line is this: Goal safety is everyone's job and your volunteers and parents need to be aware of the dangers

Don Mears
WSYSA Risk Management Director