



Canopy Safety 101: Your Guide to Canopy Safety at WSFMA Farmers Markets

Many accidents at farmers markets involve wind-blown tents, canopies, and umbrellas. WSFMA requires all member markets to minimize the risk caused by unsecured canopies by following rules for canopy safety.

Canopy weights must be attached to vendor and market canopies at all times.

Member markets agree to practice and reinforce the following guidelines by including the paragraph below in market contracts, guidelines, and vendor handbooks or policies regarding canopy use. There can be serious safety and risk management implications for failing to follow these guidelines.

“All vendors who wish to erect canopies (including umbrellas) on the Farmers Market site during a normal period of market operations, including the set up and break down period, are required to have their canopies sufficiently and safely anchored to the ground from the time their canopy is put up to the time it is taken down. Any vendor who fails to properly anchor his or her canopy will not be allowed to sell at the Farmers Market on that market day, unless that vendor chooses to take down and stow their canopy and sell without it. Each canopy leg must have no less than 24 pounds anchoring each leg, and market umbrellas require at least 50 pounds. Alternatively, canopies may be secured on grass or unpacked soil by steel auger anchors or spiral tent stakes of at least ½” thickness and 12 – 15” length, properly installed and secured. Non-spiraled, straight tent stakes are not an acceptable canopy anchoring system. Holding capacity of auger anchor systems is dependent on soil conditions and density and may not be adequate in rocky soils.”

In certain inclement weather conditions even properly secured canopies can be precarious. If canopies need to be taken down in the middle of market due to inclement weather, vendors should direct customers to move out of the way so they are not injured.

Weights and canopy tie-downs should be *safely* secured -- “safely,” meaning that the method used to secure the canopy does not create its own safety hazards:

- € Weights should not cause a tripping hazard
- € Weights should be tethered with lines that are clearly visible
- € Weights should have soft edges to avoid causing cuts and scrapes
- € Weights should be securely attached
- € Weights should be on the ground (NOT above people’s heads)

Canopies are used at markets to shield vendors and their products from sun and rain, but unpredictable winds can come up at any moment creating a safety hazard if the canopy is not properly secured.

Sufficiently weighted canopies will have at least 24 pounds per leg. One canopy manufacturer recommends at least 40 pounds on each corner of a 10x10 tent; double that on a 10x20 tent. 50 pounds should be used for umbrellas. Weights for signs will vary depending on the size of sign.

Always Be Prepared

You should always have your canopy secured to the ground. It is not enough to have the tools necessary to secure your canopy on hand if you do not employ them. Strong gusts can come up without warning anywhere, at any time. After your canopy takes flight and causes damage it is too late to decide to secure your canopy. You should assume winds will come. Indeed, they often do.

Always secure canopies. During setup and breakdown periods canopies are vulnerable to wind. Stay alert. During the peak business hours of markets, the mere presence of hundreds of shoppers, along with the tight configuration of vendors, creates a disruption in the flow of wind, reducing its force through the market. But at setup and breakdown times, the shoppers are gone, the solid block of vendors is disrupted, and you are at some point in the process of setting up or taking down your canopy. You must be sure to completely secure your canopy as soon as you set it up, and take down your canopy as soon as you remove its weights at the end of the day. Do NOT let yourself be interrupted by ANYTHING in the middle of this process, as a half-secured canopy is as dangerous, if not more dangerous, than an unsecured canopy.

Canopy Weights

The safety of farmers market shoppers should be the goal of every market's staff and vendors. In general, farmers markets are statistically among the safest places in our country. Nevertheless, canopy weights needlessly continue to pose hazards at farmers markets. Perhaps this is because we are not looking at how we set up our canopies and stalls each day from the perspective of the customer. After all, we are used to being the vendor or manager. But take a minute to really think about it from the customer's point of view...The average customer is looking at the bountiful tables filled with every sort of fresh fruits and vegetables, processed foods, crafts and so on. In other words, they are looking straight ahead, not down.

Canopy weights should be located on the ground and customers are typically not looking around for them. Thus, if the canopy weights are in the path of the customer, the customer will trip over, kick, or become entangled with them. Therefore, we need to anticipate this ahead of time and place canopy weights carefully, using materials that are least likely to injure.

Examples of Good Canopy Weights

- Filling an empty bucket (2.5 gallon works great) with cement and tying this to each corner of the tent with a rope or bungee. It is NOT sufficient to place the bucket on the feet of the canopy.
- Filling buckets/containers with sand/cement that can be anchored or secured with a rope or bungee; these include canvas bags or plastic buckets/containers that have a handle through which a rope or bungee can be secured.
- Vertical sandbag weights that are specially made for securing canopies, weighing at least 24 pounds, and strapped to the legs of the canopy.
- PVC pipe capped and filled with cement can be hung on the inside of canopy poles as long as it is secured so that it does not collide with customers.

The best weights are strapped to the bottom of each leg, and then tethered via a bungee to the top corner of the canopy, thus lowering the center of gravity of the canopy. In a strong gust of wind,

even canopies secured with enough weight can be broken if the weights are not suspended from the top corners of the canopy.

Examples of Bad Canopy Weights

- ✘ Gallon water jugs are not heavy enough for large gusts of wind. One gallon of water weighs 8 pounds. One gallon of water on each corner would be the equivalent of a 3 year old child trying to hold down a 100 square foot parachute.
- ✘ Tying tents, canopies or umbrellas to tables, coolers or vehicles provides tripping hazards and frequently does not provide adequate weight. Vendor safety is just as important as customer safety.
- ✘ Sandbags that cannot be placed upright and securely tied to the tent or canopy should not be used.
- ✘ In addition to not providing enough grip to prevent a canopy from taking flight in a strong gust of wind, non-spiraled, straight tent stakes are barely visible to shoppers and can cause a serious tripping hazard to an unsuspecting customer.
- ✘ Never use cement blocks! They are hard, easy to trip over, and are very effective toe and shin breakers.
- ✘ At all costs, avoid stretched out cords and lines. Customers and their children will get them wrapped around their arms or legs, causing them to trip and fall, and perhaps pull over your displays in the process.



In Conclusion

Practicing risk management is one of the best tools we have to keep our customers, vendors and market staff safe and secure and protect our markets from accidents and financial loss. We are all in this together – don't plan on using your insurance to pay for your mistakes! A proactive, preventive approach is always the best method for minimizing risks and ensuring safety; strong, consistently followed guidelines mean uniform industry standards, keeping insurance premiums down and markets accident-free.