

Risk management remains a crucial component of running a skating center

By Jan Mowle

Keeping skaters and customers in your entertainment center safe is of utmost importance. Training floor guards and maintaining a session checklist are crucial components of risk management. In addition, roller skate inspections and supervision throughout your facility can reduce the number of claims you might encounter against your general liability insurance.

Nancy Giltner, risk manager for 14 facilities in seven states for United Skates of America, said she has seen claims increase due to the current economic situation. Many of these centers around a lack of supervision, a floor or skate defect, reckless and fast skating or a piece sticking out of a game.

"The stories always morph after the incident," Giltner said. "The burden of proof is on the rink. We train our managers to address those items before each session. However, if an accident or injury does occur, we take an incident report right away."

The report should include such details as: information and a statement from the injured party, documenting the names of all employees working at the time of the incident, and recording whether or not the individual received medical treatment.

"We train our rink managers to dig a little deeper with the person," Giltner added. "We ask if anyone bumped them or if they just lost their balance. We also list on the report the names of the deejay and all floor guards who were on the skate floor when the incident occurred."

"We always do follow-up calls to the individuals or their parents, too," Giltner pointed out. "We document whether or not they received any medical treatment and what the results were."

At the end of each session, Giltner said they ask the manager to fill out an employee statement. It asks such questions as if the manager witnessed the incident, if he/she talked to or assisted the injured person, if he/she talked to or heard from other customers, and the results of an inspection of the area where the accident took place.

The company also requires that someone else on duty during the skate session fill out an employee statement about the incident. Their statement includes a map of the facility where they can mark the area where the accident happened.

"We're very proactive," Giltner said. "We have signs up at all of our rinks saying that patrons should not leave the building without reporting injuries to management. We also tell our concession area employees not to give out ice without consulting a manager because the person could be using it for an injury and we want to know about it."

Preventing Injury

There are many precautions that a skating center can take. Inspecting each pair of skates prior to a session can always help. Giltner said they use an inspection form for every rented skate.

"This helps to address anyone saying there was something wrong with their skates," she said. "We also have adults fill out a waiver card at the front door or at the skate counter to reduce our liability."

However, Giltner said that most states don't recognize waiver cards for minors.

She recommends that any size facility have an appointed safety director who can make sure that proper training takes place for all rink employees. This person can also make the follow-up calls for the injuries and take clear photos of the floor or the area where the accident occurred.

Giltner also suggested a mandatory training program for all floor guards at any entertainment center. In addition, she said it is a good practice to have a before-session checklist, a checklist during the session and a closing checklist. Include such items as floor sweeps, equipment checks and general safety of the facility.

She recommends that any skating center have a manual in place for floor guard training. Each rink can also have a one-time test for floor guards that they must pass before actually hitting the skate floor.

"In our facilities, we hold a floor guard meeting every six months, go over our checklists and discuss any problems," Giltner said. "Our motto is 'hear it, see it, write it and date it,'" she added.

For an in-depth look at how employees are performing, Giltner said a skating center can enlist a secret shopper program once a month, preferably on a weekend when the facility is most busy. Her rinks currently enlist the services of a company called Amusement Advantage. She pointed out that owners or managers can create their own questions for the survey.

In addition to overall friendliness of employees and the look of the facility, Giltner said they ask certain questions regarding safety, including:

- Were the floor guards monitoring the floor for safe skating?
- Was the skate floor dry, clean and free of debris?
- Were the floor guards attentive to skaters that needed help?
- Were safety and routine maintenance kept up to date?

Giltner cautions that surveillance video often doesn't hold up in court or isn't always very clear. However, she reassured operators that addressing safety regularly can help reduce the number of injuries and claims



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