



RISK MANAGEMENT ALERT

Sure Schools

SCHOOL RISK MANAGEMENT ADVISORY
Utica National Insurance Loss Control Department Bulletin

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TOPIC: High School Pole Vaulting Competition - Minimizing the Risk of Life Threatening Injuries

BACKGROUND: Information supplied by the National Federation of State High School (Athletic) Associations and the American Society for Testing and Measurements (ASTM) was used in the development of this Risk Management Alert.

According to the National Center for Catastrophic Sport Injury Research, there were 15 fatal pole vault accidents at U.S. high schools between the years of 1983-2000. During the first quarter of 2002, a college athlete from Penn State University and at least two high school athletes died as a result of injuries they sustained in separate incidents during pole vaulting practice and competitions at the college and high school levels. In a fourth incident during this same time period, another college athlete from Eastern Washington University suffered a serious head injury during a pole vault event that rendered her in a coma for several weeks.

In each of the three fatalities that occurred during the early part of 2002, student athletes struck their heads on hard surfaces while attempting to or completing their vaults. Considerable debate regarding the use of helmets in vaulting, appropriate size and matting of the landing pit, and protection of hard surfaces on and around the pole planting box occurred after these most recent incidents. As noted in the 4/9/02 edition of the Saratogian, according to Jan Johnson, 1972 Olympic bronze medalist and leader of USA Track & Field's committee on pole vaulting safety, one of the biggest problems in high schools is that even minimum safety standards are sometimes ignored.

As a result of countrywide discussions, the National Federation of High School Associations' Track and Field Rules Committee enacted several pole vault safety rule changes that took effect immediately after their June 2002 annual meetings. A summary of a few significant changes that speak to increased landing pit area, matting, and protection of the pole planting box are listed below.

- Effective immediately the overall size of the pole vault landing pad shall be a minimum of 19'8" wide by 20'2" deep.
- The landing surface measured beyond the back of the standard bases, shall be a minimum of 19'8" wide.
- The dimension of the landing surface in back of the vaulting box to the back of the landing pad shall be 16'5" deep.
- The material in the pad shall be high enough and of a composition that will decelerate the landing of the athlete.
- When the landing pad is made up of two or more sections, the landing surface shall include a common cover or pad extending over all sections. This minimizes the risk of the seams becoming hazardous to the vaulters.

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- The front sections of the landing pad, known as the front buns, shall be a minimum of 16'5" wide so as to cover the entire area around the landing box to the inside edges of the standard bases up to the front edge of the plant box.
- The maximum cutout for the planting box shall be 36 inches in width measured across the bottom of the cutout.
- The edges of the front of the landing pad immediately behind the planting box shall not be placed more than three inches from the top of the back of the planting box.
- The front pad shall be attached to the main landing pad, or encased in a common cover.
- A planting box shall be located midway between the standards. This box shall be constructed of concrete, fiberglass, metal, or other hard surface material into which the vaulting pole is placed so the top edges are at or below ground level. The front edge of the box shall not extend above the grade of the runway surface.

NOTE: It is recommended the planting box be of a color contrasting to the color of the runway and landing pad.

- A minimum of 2" dense foam padding (box collar) shall be used to pad any hard and unyielding surface including between the planting box and all pads.

For more detail regarding rules applicable to high school pole vaulting competition please refer to the National Federation of High School Associations rules, www.nfhs.org

Or contact **NFHS at (317) 972-6900**

Pole Vault Diagram

