

RISK MANAGEMENT ALERT

Sure Schools

SCHOOL RISK MANAGEMENT ADVISORY
Utica National Insurance Loss Control Department Bulletin

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Topic: Managing Ski Club Safety & Liability Exposures

BACKGROUND: The Winter recreation season has arrived! With cold temperatures and snow comes the formation of ski and snowboard clubs at school districts. Each year, students are injured as a result of participation in downhill ski & snowboard club activities. These injuries often result in liability claims being filed against the school district that sponsored the club and event. A sound risk management approach to controlling ski & snowboard club exposures is warranted in order to minimize the likelihood of injury to student skiers and also minimize the chance of a liability lawsuit being filed against schools that sponsor such outdoor activities.

This Risk Management Alert provides basic information on controlling the exposures associated with ski and snowboard clubs. It was developed in part from several reliable and nationally recognized sources including the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), National Ski Patrol (NSP), National Safety Council (NSC), and the National Ski Areas Association (NSAA).

Key elements of a school district's ski & snowboard club risk management effort should include:

- Information provided to parents that includes:
 - costs associated with all trips and club activities,
 - list of equipment and clothing necessary and recommended for their child to participate,
 - nature and difficulty of each activity the club will undertake,
 - transportation arrangements provided by the school district and all travel policies,
 - dates and locations of all activities,
 - times of departure and return from all trips,
 - supervision that will be provided for each trip/activity
 - contact information as well as site information for each trip/activity location
- Parental permission/consent to participate in writing with authorization to provide any necessary medical treatment in the event of illness or injury. This information should be available and carried with the club leader/advisor on each trip. Parents must provide fitness and medical information for their child prior to that child's participation in any ski & snowboard club activities.
- Contact information for parents or persons in parental custody for each student. Parental contact information should also be carried by the club leader/advisor during each trip.
- Instruction provided by club advisor(s) to students should address:
 - equipment necessary and recommended in order to participate in the club's activities,
 - the importance of bindings and boots that are adjusted and fit properly,
 - cold weather skin protection and the dangers/signs of hypothermia,
 - the importance of use of appropriate broad spectrum water resistant sunscreen,



- types of clothing necessary to participate in ski and snowboard activities and the various weather protection characteristics of each type of clothing,
 - safety responsibility for skiing and snowboarding,
 - the importance of never skiing/snowboarding alone,
 - only skiing on designated trails or runs that are appropriate for each student's individual skills and ability level,
 - the importance of physical fitness and conditioning prior to engaging in skiing or snowboarding activities,
 - Requirement for all beginner skiers and snowboarders to take lessons prior to or at the first club activity,
 - lessons should be conducted by qualified/certified ski instructors and preferably at the activity venue,
 - at minimum, training should include safety, responsibility, technique, determination of weather and snow conditions and use of ski lifts and tows.
- Requirement for all skiers and snowboarders to wear helmets. According to a study published by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, "Helmet use by skiers and snowboarders could prevent or reduce the severity of 44% of head injuries to adults, and 53% of head injuries to children under the age of 15. The proportion of skiing and snowboarding head injuries is higher in children than in any other age group."
See: <http://www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/prerel/prhtml99/99046.html>
- Use of supervisors, chaperones and instructors that are trained, competent downhill skiers and/or snowboarders.
- Supervisors and chaperones must be required to actively supervise the group of students on each trip rather than turn them loose at the trip venue to ski on their own. *****The school retains responsibility for supervision of students on each club trip. This responsibility should never be abdicated to the ski center!**
- Chaperones, supervisors, instructors and/or club advisors should contact the trip venue and inquire about local conditions at all trip locations prior to each club activity. Information about ski area conditions and emergency services should be shared with all trip attendees prior to the trip.
- The club advisor or teacher-in-charge must be responsible to ensure that all students are properly prepared and equipped prior to trip departure.
- Safety is the top priority. Students should be transported only in vehicles that meet all Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards (FMVSS) for school busses. Fifteen-passenger/non-conforming vans should never be used to transport students.
- A fully stocked first aid kit should be taken on each club trip. At least one chaperone or the club advisor must be trained in first aid and CPR. Also, all chaperones and club advisors or teachers must be aware of emergency procedures for many different scenarios ranging from an injured or missing child to severe weather or motor vehicle accident.
- Emergency communication equipment such as cell phones and/or bus radios should be readily available on each trip.

Ideally, each club trip should receive school board approval.

For more specific information on ski and snowboard equipment, suggested clothing lists, rules for safe skiing & snowboarding and the Skier's Responsibility Code please visit the following web sites:

U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission	www.cpsc.gov
National Ski Patrol	www.nsp.org
National Safety Council	www.nsc.org
National Ski Areas Association	www.nsaa.org