

FACILITIES, EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES

Prof. Paul Singh, 2006.

*“Bringing multi-disciplinary sports facilities to the rural areas
will unleash a massive pool of potential sports stars”
(Rev. M. A. Stofile, Minister of Sport & Recreation)*

INTRODUCTION

There has been an overall increase in sport, recreation and adventure activities worldwide. New sport and recreation activities are introduced all the time. Participants and spectators in these activities have the right to expect that they will be carried out in safe surroundings that are properly designed and with well maintained equipment. Today, several people work in the sport environment, and those who hire their labour are regarded as their employers. The Occupational Health and Safety Act (85 of 1993) requires employers and persons who are in charge of work premises to maintain the workplace and the equipment used therein in an efficient state. This implies that facilities must be kept in good repair and in total working order. The regulations cover matters such as ventilation, lighting, cleanliness, temperature, traffic routes for pedestrians, operation of dangerous machinery, handling and storage of hazardous materials, sanitary conveniences, and facilities for rest or changing and showering, first aid, emergency equipment and procedures, personal safety equipment, and safety policy requirements from employers.

Sport organisations are expected to provide a reasonable standard of care for the safety and security of their members and patrons. If they drop below the standard of care that is expected of a reasonable and prudent coach, physical educator or instructor in ensuring safe environments and proper equipment they will be inviting harm or injuries, and trouble with the law. No one can be expected to assume the risk of unsafe equipment, hazardous play spaces, locker rooms that are not secure, or fields and courts that have not been inspected and maintained regularly. There are a number of problem areas to keep in mind when drawing up a risk management plan for sports grounds, facilities, equipment and supplies. These will be covered next.

FACILITIES

- ❑ Many sports facilities were not built for any specific sport. Today, especially at social and community levels of sport and recreation, many improvised and converted buildings or spaces are used, and they may be far from ideal in terms of safety. Therefore, where this is the case, facility managers must ensure that the facility does not endanger players or spectators in any way.
- ❑ Facilities must be used in a safe manner. Even the safest facility can be turned into an unsafe environment because of the way a game is played, courts are laid out or human traffic is routed through it. Children are immature, impulsive and not always capable of foreseeing the likelihood of injuring themselves. This is a common cause of accidents. Officials should therefore ensure that children do not run across playing areas when games are in progress.
- ❑ One should ensure that anything such as structures or equipment protruding or jutting out are covered and padded. All glass surfaces should be covered, protected or reinforced.
- ❑ The sun can be an unwanted hazard in an enclosed space, as it can temporarily blind participants, causing them to fall from apparatus or to lose sight of the ball or an opponent. When temporarily blinded in this way, they could be hit by a ball or they could run into an opponent. This is an unnecessary hazard in an enclosed space. Curtains or blinds may be necessary, or the activity or apparatus should be repositioned away from the sun's rays to avoid such danger.
- ❑ Entrances and exits should be carefully checked. Doors to playing areas should open outwards. In addition, if the playing or practice areas extend close to the entrances, as is often the case with volleyball and basketball courts, the entry of latecomers should be monitored, especially after competitions have begun.
- ❑ Ensure that the building, pitch, track or pool is thoroughly examined and approved by the governing body (National Federation) and/or the local authority inspectors before hiring, using or buying such facilities. In the case

of multiple-use or shared facilities, which are a common trend today, check everything before using it. The previous users may have not observed your own high standards of safety. They may have left the facility in a condition that could turn out to be hazardous. Unsafe grounds should not be used, and activities should be postponed until they are safe to use again. In extreme cases, where the hazardous condition cannot be remedied, it is prudent to be conservative and the activity should rather be cancelled.

- Coaches and administrators should always be aware of the current health and safety regulations covering the facility they use. These could be National Laws (eg. Occupational Health and Safety Act), Local Laws (eg. Local Authority by-laws), or internal regulations of their club/ organisation (eg. replacing weights after use; or not diving into the shallow end of the pool). They should ensure that they and their players are aware of basic emergency procedures in case of evacuations or accidents.
- Indoor halls and gymnasiums should not have any low windows or ordinary plate glass if the users are going to play a wide variety of games. In the case of *Ralph v London County Council* (1947), a pupil was taking part in a game of 'touch' in the school's assembly hall under the supervision of an educator. One side of the hall had glass partitions with doors in them. The glass partitions were three feet from the ground. During the game the pupil, whilst being chased by another boy, unwittingly put his hand through one of the glass partitions, and was seriously injured. The judge held that it could have been foreseen that such an accident might have happened and therefore Ralph was entitled to damages.
- The Safety at Sports and Recreational Events Bill (2005) has come about because of the Government's intent to ensure that spectators are not exposed to safety and security risks when they attend sport or recreational events. This is especially crucial to avoid situations like the Ellis Park Disaster of April 2001, when 43 soccer fans died in the crush at a derby match between Kaiser Chiefs and Orlando Pirates. It is also a proactive step in planning for the 2010 FIFA World Cup.

This Bill requires a revolutionary change to the way in which soccer, cricket and rugby matches are staged in the country. It provides a new approach to create a culture of safety and security at sports events that will ensure the physical well-being and safety of all persons attending sports and recreational events at stadiums in South Africa.

The Bill requires that all sports and recreational governing bodies and their management must have proper safety and security measures in place. They must place the broader sport and recreational interests above their own, with a focus on the promotion and maintenance of the safety, security and convenience of all persons who attend stadiums. If they do not comply, sport federations, stadium owners, and event promoters will be liable for prosecution and for jail sentences of up to ten years and huge fines.

EQUIPMENT

Whenever equipment is being set-up or taken down, the manufacturer's instructions and the Governing Body's (Federation's) guidelines should be closely followed. This could involve showing the following:

- ❑ how the equipment is assembled and taken down
- ❑ how to lift and handle the equipment properly
- ❑ how to check it is working safely
- ❑ a safe site to position the equipment or apparatus
- ❑ how and where it is stored after use

Although each sport has its own specific equipment needs, the following guidelines will help to ensure safety:

- ❑ **Maintenance:** Regardless of whether it is your specific responsibility or not, you should inform the manager or supervisor in charge if equipment is in poor condition and in need of maintenance. Records should be kept of any damage, missing parts or incorrect operation. Proper handling and care of equipment and facilities helps to reduce wear and tear.

- ❑ **Equipment Modification:** Do not modify equipment because this may make them potentially hazardous. Manufacturers' warranties only apply if the equipment is used for what it was designed to do. Thus, if you modify the equipment or use it inappropriately, the manufacturer will not honour the warranty.
- ❑ **Repairs:** These must be done by a qualified, responsible person. They must thereafter be checked by a supervisor before use of the repaired area or equipment. Ensure that all repair materials and tools etc. have been cleared from the site.
- ❑ **Pre-Competition:** Always check that equipment is set-up according to the guidelines given by the manufacturer or governing body. Damaged or faulty items can cause injury or death, and should be taken off-line until repaired or replaced. If they are too large or heavy to remove, place a sign on them notifying users that they are temporarily out of order, or they could be covered up.
- ❑ **Location:** Ensure that equipment is left in suitable and safe surroundings. Avoid potentially hazardous situations for participants and yourself eg. setting up playing areas for children in unfenced spaces that are close to motor traffic; leaving springboards or trampolines unsupervised in the presence of youth.
- ❑ **Incorrect Size:** Such equipment can cause problems, mainly for young participants. Loose fitting pads, guards and helmets may not provide the protection they were meant to give. Most protective equipment is designed to withstand a specific amount of force, and therefore if they are not matched to the level of the participants, their age, size and/or skill, they are likely to be damaged and fail to protect the user. Always keep size and age in mind when selecting equipment and outfits to be used.
- ❑ **Supervision:** Appropriate supervision is a must in sport. Supervisors may be coaches, instructors, referees, educators, parents or senior team players. They should always have an eye on the safety of their charges. Sport organizations are careful to ensure that apparatus is only used by or under the supervision of qualified people. A coach or educator who ignores this, and the head of the

organization who has knowledge of this misconduct, may be negligent. The case of *Kershaw v Hampshire County Council* (1982) concerning the use of a mini-trampoline in a class of 12 year old girls illustrates the need for special care in the use of apparatus.

Young Kershaw was injured when she was vaulting and somersaulting over a box. She ran and bounced on the trampoline but flew too high and too fast and fell. The judge found that it was known, or should have been generally known to responsible organizers in this field, that the use of a mini-trampoline was somewhat more dangerous than the use of a normal springboard and the use of the mini-trampoline did have a greater tendency to lead to an accident.

The girl had participated in the exercise successfully before and there were two girls acting as spotters. Unfortunately, the educator left the gymnasium to go to the office just prior to the girl's fall and there was thus no supervision by an adult. The judge found that the educator should have been present to provide the necessary support and supervision throughout this particular exercise and that if the educator had to leave the learners alone in the gymnasium, the reasonable thing to do would have been to stop the activity until her return.

- They should be prepared to show players and to instruct them how to use equipment safely. They should carefully monitor the progress of any novices and children who are involved. Coaches, sport educators and activity leaders should not allow an activity to begin, if participants do not wear the protective gear required by the rules of their sport.
- **Time:** Take time to ensure that the equipment is safe and fit for use. Ensure that the equipment you need is available beforehand. A few minutes taken to inspect facilities and equipment before using them, is time well spent. You should therefore allow sufficient time for this duty of checking and ensuring that play equipment is safe.

SURFACES

Although different sports make use of different types of surfaces, some of which may be natural (eg. grass, wood, or water), synthetic surfaces (eg. astro-turf, tartan tracks) are increasingly becoming popular. While these may be consistent and durable, they also cause problems:

- ❑ Carpeted floors are difficult to clean and could create a risk of infection if the skin is broken.
- ❑ Changes of surface (eg. asphalt, grass, wood, tartan tracks) can cause injury. Shin splints and damage to achilles tendons can result from sudden changes in the playing surface.

Sport leaders should firstly ensure that the surface is safe to use and suitable for the activity to be undertaken. Grounds should be inspected daily for holes, uneven areas and debris. Any dangerous material found on the grounds eg. broken bottles, sharp objects and stones, should be removed immediately. Instructors and coaches should remember that certain surfaces require specific footwear, without which injuries are a real possibility. They should keep a personal record of the type of injuries which occur while using different surfaces, especially synthetic ones.

INFORMATION

Participants and spectators should be made aware of the rules, organisation and safety requirements of the specific sport environment. Emergency procedures should be reinforced and practiced whenever possible. If there is a need to adopt a specific safety code, then its benefit should be explained and people reminded of its importance. Additional means could be used to promote safety and healthy practices (posters, diet sheets, instruction cards, warnings, notices, codes of conduct, etc.). The leader should be in a position to offer extra advice and information to those participants who show an interest, especially novices.

Communication with emergency services

It is vital that you have easy access to and communication with emergency services. There must be a telephone available to contact a doctor or paramedic. Ensure that if the facility is in use after the usual hours, that the telephone is not locked away. Also, it is advisable to have the following next to the telephone:

- ❑ Simple instructions on how to dial out.
- ❑ A list of the most urgent numbers to dial in an emergency. Modern telephones can store emergency numbers such as medical doctor, paramedic, police and fire departments. The digit to dial for each of these is then displayed next to or on the phone.

It is essential to keep an injury or accident record book. You should record the facts relating to what took place, where and how the accident/ injury occurred. The next article on medical care of participants will elaborate on the details about first aid provision.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FACILITIES, EQUIPMENT & SUPPLIES

- ❑ Equipment and facility areas that are not in use should be securely locked. Even when children or youthful participants are not supposed to be in a certain area or use certain equipment, they can be attracted to use them by the nature of the equipment or facility setting, eg. a trampoline left unsupervised is likely to attract passers-by to jump onto them; or children having free access to a swimming pool that is left unlocked. Using unauthorised equipment or areas or participating in an unsupervised activity can have serious consequences for the sport club or its supervisory staff if someone is injured. Warning notices about equipment, facilities, and their use must be displayed where people can see them. They should also be in a language that can be read and simple enough to be understood. Regular announcements in this regard will assist to reinforce such warnings and regulations.

- ❑ Hazardous supplies, such as chemicals, cleaning agents, fuels, pool acid etc. must be stored in clearly labeled containers. Together with tools and maintenance equipment, they must be kept locked in a separate store room away from the usual playing equipment and gear. The door to this store room should have a sign stating 'hazardous materials'.
- ❑ In South Africa, because of the harsh sunshine, and much of our sport taking place in the outdoors, participants should be advised to protect themselves from exposure to the sun by using appropriate sunscreens. Sport organizations should increase awareness, influence behaviour and create an appropriate environment for participants to stay safe in the sun.
- ❑ Exercising for long periods in the sun and heat could have serious consequences. One of the main problems is dehydration, because the body loses water through sweating. Therefore care must be taken to ensure that such participants constantly re-hydrate themselves by drinking sufficient fluids, particularly for endurance events like road races, cycle events, fun runs, hiking, etc.
- ❑ A written checklist of equipment and apparatus should be drawn up. An inspection should be made regularly. The date of inspection must be recorded to show that it was done at regular intervals.
- ❑ Emergency procedures at facilities should be rehearsed or drilled and all supervisory staff should know exactly how to activate and implement the emergency process.

For more information, you may visit/contact the following websites/ organizations:

South African Bureau of Standards (SABS): www.sabs.co.za

National Acts can be downloaded free of charge here. www.acts.co.za or www.polity.org.za

You may contact the following Sports Law Bodies for more information or specific assistance: Centre for Sport Law at University of Johannesburg (www.uj.ac.za/law), telephone Prof. Cornelius at 011/489 2915, or Prof. Singh at 011/489 3685; The Sports Law Association of South Africa (tracyg@postman.co.za) , PO Box 34149 Rhodesgift.