

Protect Your Arena with Thorough Skate Guard Training

EDGE – SEPT/OCT 2005

by Jimmie Santee

During public skating sessions, the combination of varying skill levels and poor supervision can lead to loss of revenue and potential lawsuits. Even with experienced and well-trained skate guards, accidents can and will happen. Your staff's reaction to these events can make the difference between winning and losing a lawsuit. Additionally, poor customer relationships can result in losing skaters to other arenas or even other recreational opportunities. Managers must continually train their employees in various supervisory skills, First Aid and customer service. All training should be documented with a detailed agenda and sign-in sheet, and should be kept on file for future reference.

Hiring the right person

Not everyone who applies for a skate guard position is suited for it. It takes a special person with both the right attitude and skating skills to be successful. Managers must choose wisely or they can end up with a bigger problem than if they had no guards at all.

After hiring a new skate guard, the first step is providing job specific training. The training should include the following:

- An accurate and detailed job description
- Review of duties and responsibilities
- On-ice supervision and assistance
- Continued monitoring and evaluation
- Periodic in-service training (paid training sessions) and evaluations

The job description

A well-written job description provides direction for an employee and spells out what is expected of him or her. The chain of command should be explained as well as a description of the duties involved. Qualifications should include:

- Minimum of 16 years of age
- Ability to skate under control and perform basic skating skills
- Ability to perform basic First Aid

Although some states allow younger employees, children under 16 may have difficulty in handling unruly patrons or serious injuries.

Duties and responsibilities

Skate guards provide supervision of the arena's public skating sessions. They can also perform custodial duties. Their responsibilities should include:

- Constant surveillance of the ice rink patrons and ice conditions during hours of public skating
- Repair/patch unsafe ice conditions and/or cone off area when necessary
- Point out potential hazards to supervisor when necessary

- Evaluate injured persons, apply First Aid and/or call 911; immediately contact supervisor; complete accident/incident report and give completed form to supervisor on duty
- Perform general cleaning of the public areas, including rink, lobby and bathrooms

On-ice training

On-ice training is a wonderful way for your staff to experience various scenarios and build teamwork. Providing your guards with detailed instructions on how to handle different situations will ensure that they will be successful. Have fun with these training sessions and make them as realistic as possible. Role-playing with guards acting as victims or unruly patrons is fun and can give your guards the opportunity to practice their First Aid or crowd-control skills.

Several scenarios can be created for these purposes. Fake blood, severed body parts, etc. are all available during the Halloween season. Place stage blood on a rubber severed finger and place it on the ice. Some blood on your victim's hand and some minor acting can make it quite realistic. This process helps desensitize your employees to the sight of a wound and allows them to practice their First Aid skills.

Another scenario can be done with an unruly skater. Dealing with verbal confrontations is an important skill to practice. Andy Deyo, a frequent speaker at ISI conferences, uses this formula when dealing with angry customers. It is simple to use and easy to teach:

- Listen while the customer vents. Take notes and ask open-ended questions.
- Stay in control. Match the customer's energy, not their anger.
- Own the problem . Take the problem and customer seriously.
- Offer resolution. Ask: "What can I do to make this right?"
- Do it! A difficult situation will worsen considerably if promises are made and not kept.
- Follow up. A formal or informal follow-up will cement the relationship. People may doubt what you say, but they always believe what you do.

Written instructions

In addition to on-ice training, the guards should receive written instructions. These instructions should explain in detail each guard's duty during his or her shift. Here are some of the instructions that are distributed to my staff:

- Skate guards must arrive 15 minutes prior to the scheduled session time.
- Guards are responsible for the overall safety of the patrons. Set safety cones out, if required.
- Check the condition of the ice surface and boards. Doors to the team boxes and penalty boxes must remain closed at all times. Once a safety check has been completed, skaters may enter ice.
- The arena supervisor will assign the skate guard's position, rotating frequently to keep the guards alert. During the busiest sessions, a guard will be posted at the ice gateway to ensure that all skaters enter and exit the ice safely. Additional guards can skate with or counter to the direction of the flow of traffic. Guards must not group together while on duty.
- During ice resurfaces, make sure all skaters are off the ice, doors are closed, and cones and other objects are clear from the ice and nothing is hanging over the barriers.
- Guards must maintain a safe skating environment at all times, making sure patrons follow the

posted skating rules. Not every rule can be posted, but common sense should prevail in all situations. (Managers: Empower the guards with the authority to make decisions based on common sense.)

- Guards should be clearly identified, wearing a bright-colored jacket and nametag. This will identify the guard as an employee.
- First Aid hip packs (with rubber gloves, bandages, breathing mask, etc.) should be worn.
- The Public Safety Department should be called in any emergency.
- When calling 911, identify yourself and your location as well as the situation. Follow the directions of the operator.
- Following the phone call, report to your immediate supervisor and brief them on the situation. If the immediate supervisor is not available, follow the chain of command until speaking with someone of authority.
- An accident/incident report must be filled out and delivered to your supervisor immediately. Accident/incident reports are considered internal documents and are not to be shared or copied.
- Be aware of the location of all emergency exits from both the ice and the building.
- In the event of a crisis or disaster, you are responsible for evacuating the area or arena if necessary.

Skate guard techniques

Once you've given your guards their written instructions, it's time to teach them the tricks of the trade. Techniques will vary depending on the volume of skating traffic or the number of guards on duty. Guards should move their head and eyes constantly, stopping no longer than 6-8 seconds at a time, paying special attention to the entrances and exits. Skate guards should not allow skaters to go behind their vision or stand with their back to the flow of traffic. Guards should look to identify weak skaters. Teach guards to watch for behaviors that could cause problems — scuffles, teasing and challenging — and listen for cries or calls for help.

Evaluations

Evaluating the skate guard is a must. The evaluation should be used as a tool to improve the employee's performance, not as a source of discipline. The evaluations should include constructive criticism as well as praise. Employee evaluations should be signed by the employees and kept in their personnel file. Each skate guard should receive a copy of their evaluation as well.

A well-trained supervisory staff will enhance the arena's reputation as a friendly and safe place for family fun. Increasing public satisfaction and minimizing the chances for lawsuits will reflect in the bottom line and create a great place to work and skate.

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