

Train Employees in Safety Awareness

by Jeffrey Doucette

Safety is a critically important function in ice arena management. Countless articles and training sessions are devoted to this issue, whether it's under the auspices of risk management, insurance requirements, air quality, fire protection or first aid/CPR. Safety is an issue that cannot be over-emphasized.

One group often under-utilized in a focus on safety is entry level or part-time employees. While full-time staff members are often responsible for most safety and risk management issues, entry level or beginning employees can offer a new perspective and fresh eyes. Full-time employees can become complacent with their surroundings, due to human nature and the amount of time they must devote to other duties and responsibilities. There is a natural tendency to overlook, or not take sufficient time to adequately notice, all the potential hazards in an ice arena.

For example, few full-time arena personnel spend much time on the ice surface, with the exception of resurfacing or performing other ice maintenance. Skate guards spend the majority of their time on the ice and can be utilized as safety inspectors, especially during low attendance sessions. Skate guards can be trained to perform simple, close-up inspections of the boards, glass and supports. Regular visual inspections and common sense could save someone from possible injury. Vigilant skate guards should be alert to problems and potential hazards before injuries occur.

Hazards off the ice, such as spilled soft drinks, discarded chewing gum or improper cleaning agents on the floor, may not be as noticeable to someone wearing street shoes but can have a totally different effect on people wearing skates. Skate guards wear ice skates and should be alert to potential problems and should report them to their supervisors for correction. For example, a new rubber floor is not slippery to someone in street shoes but could be very slippery to someone on ice skates. Clean your new rubber floor several times before allowing customers to use it.

Many ice arenas assign risk management responsibilities to the maintenance staff or custodial staff. Maintenance in an ice arena can be overwhelming in a high-use facility, given the tendency to keep staff numbers to a minimum. Either there is not enough time in a day to perform maintenance functions and safety inspections, or some areas of a facility may get overlooked due to a natural tendency toward familiar paths. People tend to follow a path of entering the building the same way every day.

How often do you really look at the surroundings outside the door or the actual door you routinely enter? The bottom of the door may have been rusting for a year; do you notice it? Probably not. This familiar path is natural and difficult to change without a conscious effort to do so. That is why new faces and new feet are invaluable. Part-time personnel should be encouraged to take notice and to report possible or real hazards for the protection of customers and employees. Involving new people in this critical phase of operations gives them a sense of satisfaction and, when performed well, should be recognized and rewarded by management.

Managers and supervisors should train all part-time employees in good safety practices and safety consciousness. Part-time employees should be encouraged to go the extra mile. Look around, look up at the ceiling; do you see any falling tiles or loose ceiling parts? How about burned out exit sign lights over less frequently used doorways? Is there an unusual smell? Are there pieces of board glass sticking out or cracked acrylic that may have sharp edges? Are screws protruding out of the cap rail

or the kick plate? Is one of the tires on the resurfacer low on air? Is the resurfacer leaking something onto the ice or giving the driver a headache? When you walk an injured customer off the ice, do you have to walk around bubbled up rubber tile that needs repair or replacement? When you sit with customers, are the rental skates broken down, are the skates' edges dull? When you reach into the first aid box, are all the necessary supplies in place? Take notice and report any potential problems or hazards.

All ice arena employees have a role in safety consciousness, and the fresh eyes of newly hired or part-time employees can be a valuable asset if safety is stressed during the training period and beyond. Encourage employees to open their eyes, ears, and nose and to speak up about safety concerns.

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