
Gymnastics Safety and Risk Management Audits

Risk management has always been a key issue for the Gymnastics industry to address. However, with recent events surrounding matters related to the insurance industry, risk management is now possibly the most important issue facing our industry. Demonstrating good risk management practices has been proven to reduce the number and severity of Gymnastics related injuries and may assist in reducing the number of negligence claims made against the sport.

Everyone deals constantly with a variety of potential risks on a daily basis. Just by getting into the car to drive somewhere we face the possibility of injury to ourselves or others, and financial loss if we break the law speeding to our destination or if we damage our car. Somehow, among these and other risks, we manage to continue with our lives. Risk is not something we can avoid completely, but it is something we can manage. Risk is not something we even want to eliminate, risk makes life exciting. Hazards on the other hand must be eliminated in order to reduce the possibility of catastrophic injury.

Participants involved in Gymnastics activities cannot be expected to accept injuries as part of their chosen pastime, and individuals and organizations providing these opportunities must take action to prevent things going wrong.

There is an enormous amount of information available on safety, risk management, legal and insurance issues, and the task of developing a risk management plan can seem daunting. Many individuals and organizations choose to ignore reality and hope it is an issue they will never have to deal with. Unfortunately ignorance is not an excuse and this position could prove costly in the long term. Something as simple as failing to warn the participant of a risk of injury, even though the risk might be small, could be a breach of your legal duty and place your organization at risk of a negligence claim.

A risk is any exposure to potential loss or damage that can impact on your organization. Risk management is just systematically identifying threats (risks) to your organization and developing ways to minimize those occurring. You are already practicing risk management to some degree, but it is important that you formalize what you do.

Risk management involves developing a system of policies, systems and procedures. You cannot eliminate all risks, but you can manage them appropriately. Risk management needs to become a part of the culture of your organization, rather than being seen as something separate. Even if the process used is informal, it should be documented and based on a known system.

Risks can generally be grouped under four headings:

1. Physical - injury or damage to persons or property
2. Legal - breaching legal obligations
3. Moral / Ethical - harm to your organization's reputation
4. Financial - loss of assets of the organization

Some examples of risks include:

- Insufficient qualification of staff
- Equipment failure

- Attracting too many participants for an event
- Discrimination or harassment
- Injury to a staff member, spectator or participant
- Negative publicity
- Damage to the environment
- Loss of property

How do you manage risk?

There are three main stages in risk management namely: identification, assessment and treatment. A safety and risk management audit can assist you to work through these stages by following a simple ten step process to developing a risk management plan.

In summary, the ten steps to develop a risk management plan are:

1. Make a commitment as an organization to risk management.
2. Identify all hazards and possible risks.
3. Assess the level of each risk.
4. Decide to accept or manage each risk.
5. Determine management options for all unacceptable risks.
6. Formalize your risk management action plan.
7. Implement your management options.
8. Communicate information to everyone affected.
9. Review your risk management action plan on a regular basis.
10. Identify any new risks and update your plan.

Audits are useful tools as a starting point to identify risks. However they are not definitive and each organization will have issues that are specific to them that must be considered.

An example of the sorts questions you might find in an audit include:

- Does your Board or staff meet regularly with all decisions and actions documented?
- Is the annual report or meeting minutes circulated to all members?
- Are all financial transactions accurately recorded?
- Does the organization have the following insurance coverage - public liability, professional indemnity and director's and officer's liability?
- Are your rules, by-laws and practices non-discriminatory?
- Do you have a clear plan for the future that describes what you want to do and how you are going to do it?
- Have you considered the health and safety of everyone in the organization and do you meet OHS/A regulations?
- Do all coaches/instructors/leaders have appropriate, current accreditation?

- Does staff receive regular ongoing training to keep up to date on Gymnastics standards?
- Do you conduct risk assessments on all programs, activities and events?
- Is there a clear procedure for reporting accidents/injuries?

How did you do? Could you answer YES for each of these? If not there may some issues here you need to address. But there may also be others. To arrange for your Gym.Net Safety and Risk Management Audit and access more comprehensive tools on how to assess these risks and implement a plan to treat them, contact us at coacht@gym.net or call 650.325.3155.

The Gym.Net Safety and Risk Management Audit

To assist organizations in identifying risks rather than wait for a disaster, progressive organizations are now shifting to a culture of continuous improvement and using safety audits as a tool to guide their direction in risk management.

A Gym.Net Gymnastics Safety and Risk Management Audit is a systematic and critical examination of the key risks and safety areas in an organization. We utilize on-site inspections and interviews as a diagnostic tool which will disclose an organization's strengths, weaknesses and main areas of vulnerability to risk.

It is clear that all Gymnastics organizations are subject to potential liabilities simply as a result of what they do. A Gym.Net Gymnastics Safety and Risk Management Audit aims to give you the basic information to help you understand what you need to do to manage risk and why. By being aware of what those liabilities are and adopting the risk management practices and obtaining appropriate insurance, organizations can go a long way towards reducing the likelihood of those liabilities occurring.

The audit has been designed to demystify the process of risk management and was developed on the premise that within Gymnastics organizations there is limited expertise in the area of risk management. This resource will not provide you with a solution to every possible situation, but it will, in simple terms, explain risk management and assist your organization to develop a process to identify, assess and manage risk.

The audit report is meant to be a detailed "how to" manual, but also provides an introductory guide with references to other resources which you can access depending upon your needs. There is no single solution that works for all organizations. Every Gymnastics organization will need to develop a customized solution that meets its particular needs and circumstances. This audit should help direct you on your way, to assist in determining the process you need to follow to identify, assess and manage risk.

Fees and Rates

Solution analysis projects (business evaluation) and risk management projects (Safety and Risk Management Audits) are bid and billed based on the project's scope. Prices range typically between \$600 and \$8,000 depending upon the project.

Gym.Net charges \$150 per hour for all research, report or deposition reading and travel time.

Gym.Net charges \$175 per hour for deposition or expert witness report writing and trial testimony.

Gym.Net can be retained at a daily rate. This rate is \$800 per day for non-profit organizations and \$1,000 for all other clients (excluding trial work or depositions) plus expenses. If an executive report takes longer than the eight (8) hour day to complete, each additional hour will be billed at \$75.00 per hour.

Clients wishing to retain Gym.Net on a full-time basis can purchase a one-year plan. For a yearly fee of \$2,000 a client receives 20 hours a year of potential service for research, surveying, writing, or investigation. Any hours over 20 hours are billed at \$125 per hour (excluding trial work or depositions). Any unused hours are extinguished at the end of the 12 month period from the contract execution date if not utilized. However, if a client renews their one year contract the hours are carried over to the next year.

The following represent a brief sampling of the types of services Gym.Net has provided over the years.

- Assisted a national youth sport association in developing a comprehensive nationwide coach's education program.
- Provided expert testimony in a number of Gymnastics injury lawsuits – some on behalf of the plaintiff and others representing the defense.
- Assisted a national youth sport association in conducting a comprehensive nationwide sport parent education program.
- Completed a comprehensive playground inspection audit for a major University child care operation, which determined that their existing playground presented a significant liability risk.
- Assisted several youth sport organizations in developing appropriate responses to deal with ADA concerns, employee misconduct, and coaching education.
- Conducted a large scale analysis on the entire Gymnastics operation for a major California city that resulted in that City re-emphasizing their recreational Gymnastics program and increasing enrollment substantially.
- Developed comprehensive employee manuals, incident reporting procedures, and risk management guidelines for several major park and recreation departments.
- Undertake comprehensive school audits examining life safety, fire code, and general risk management concerns.

Qualifications / Curriculum Vitae (modified)

Michael Taylor has gymnastics experience since 1968 as a competitor, coach, judge, club owner, director, recreational athlete and administrator, I am currently a Senior Recreation Supervisor for the Community Services Department of the City of Menlo Park in Menlo Park, CA. My immediate duties include supervising the 1700 student Gymnastics program. I have been a National Safety Instructor for USA Gymnastics (USAG), the official Olympic and National governing body for the sport of Gymnastics, since 1992. I also serve USAG as a member of the National Safety / Risk Management Review Board and the National PreSchool Advisory Committee. I am a Professional Development Certification Programs Instructor, a Kinder Accreditation Teacher and Movement Education Development Course Instructor. I have presented seminars at the USAG National Congress on topics that included "Safety in the Gym for Class Instructors," "Setting up your PreSchool Gym Safely," and "Partner Parents" among

others. I am an active member of the United States Elite Coaches Association (USECA) and publish featured monthly articles in the USECA Newsletter. I am a regular clinician / presenter at the USAG Region 1 Congress and have presented workshops and seminars at the California Parks and Recreation Society Bay Area Institute. I have published articles in USAG *Technique Magazine* and in *USA Gymnast Magazine* on "The Benefits of Gymnastics," "The Code of Points for Marketing," and "Positive Coaching" among others. I am a featured columnist on the USA Gymnastics Online website (www.usa-gymnastics.org). I am CPR / First Aid / Sport Safety Certifier for the American Red Cross, a National Association for Sport & Physical Education member and an American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, and Dance member. I have been a Coaching Principles Course Instructor for the American Sport Education Program since 1981 and am an Instructor for the Stanford University based Positive Coaching Alliance. I am a Certified Pool Operator and a licensed National Playground Safety Inspector.