



Risk Management Considerations for Soccer Fields and Baseball Diamonds

Two public school students were hanging out at a baseball diamond during their lunch hour. One student was standing inside the baseball diamond leaning against a chain link fence and the other student was standing on the other side of the fence. As the student leaned on the fence, a sharp piece of fencing jitted out and pierced the other boy's eye, causing him to lose his sight. There had been a large hole cut in the fence and this hazard was known to the municipality when the child was injured.

Background Information

Most municipalities have many soccer fields and baseball diamonds that are open for free play during the summer months. They are often located near school properties and are easily accessible to children. Your organization has a duty, as an occupier, to keep the equipment and property in a safe condition to accommodate its intended purpose.

There are a number of considerations that need to be taken into account when examining soccer fields and baseball diamonds. These may include use by schools, sports associations and teams as well as individual use. There are many people in the community who use these facilities daily, making your municipality's exposure to liability great.

The following considerations can help reduce the risk.

Risk Management Considerations for Soccer Fields and Baseball Diamonds

A) Location of the play field

- The location of the playing field needs to be well thought out.
- The playing field shouldn't be close to any natural hazards, such as natural bodies of water, drop-offs or cliffs.
- Playing fields should not be located close to busy roadways.
- There shouldn't be any large wooded areas near the soccer pitch or baseball diamond, as children can easily get lost and they provide cover for predators.
- The path to get to the field must be free of hazards.
- Don't locate the baseball diamond too close to a parking area, sidewalk, or roadway, because errant balls could strike cars or pedestrians.
- Ensure that the soccer field and baseball diamond isn't too close to playground equipment, so that children aren't in danger of being hit.

B) Contracts

- If the maintenance of the soccer field or baseball diamond is being contracted out to someone other than the city, ensure you have a written (not verbal) contract covering their duties, responsibilities, pay and length of commitment, etc. If you rent the play fields out to soccer associations or baseball leagues, make sure you have a written rental agreement in place.
- Depending on the amount of use by the associations or leagues, they may be required to take part in some of the maintenance of the fields.

C) Fencing

- Ensure that the fencing around the baseball diamond is in good condition with no breaks, holes, or protrusions.
- Always have a protective cover over the top of the chain link fencing and replace the cover if it becomes damaged.
- Consult municipal by-laws and building codes for regulations on fence height.
- Pay careful attention to the height of the fence behind home plate and in front of bleachers, to ensure the safety of spectators.

D) Bleachers

- Always inspect wood bleachers thoroughly for any signs of rotting, splintering, or breakage.
- For metal bleachers, check for any bending or breaking of the metal.
- Check bleachers for protruding nuts, bolts, or sharp metal.
- Ensure that the top row of bleachers has a back rest to prevent people from falling off.
- Make sure there are railings on the sides of the bleachers to prevent falling.
- Consult municipal by-laws and building codes for regulations on bleacher step height.
- Inspect the area around the bleachers for any poles, metal, or debris, in case someone was to fall.

E) Inspections

- Establish a comprehensive policy regarding soccer field and baseball diamond inspections.
- Perform regular inspections of the playing fields.

- Create a standard inspection checklist and have inspectors document their findings and file the report with the municipality.
- Inspect all aspects of the soccer field, including:
 - Field – check for any holes, divots, or dips in the field, or any other trip hazards, including sprinkler heads.
 - Nets – ensure the netting is secured and free of debris.
 - Goal Posts – make sure that the goal posts are secure and fit tightly into the ground, so they don't pose a hazard of falling onto players.
 - Benches – if there are benches, check their stability and their general condition. Report any loose or protruding nuts and bolts and if any of the wood planks are rotting.
- Inspect all aspects of the baseball diamond, including:
 - Bleachers – check for rotting planks, broken benches, protruding nuts and bolts and sharp edges. (See bleachers section above).
 - Bases – ensure that base pegs are fully in the ground and the bases are secure.
 - Fencing – See fencing section above.
 - Infield – check the infield for any debris or litter, especially glass.
 - Outfield – check for any holes, divots, or dips in the field, or any other trip hazards, including sprinkler heads.
- Create a separate form that inspectors should fill out regarding hazards. Include specific information about the hazard, including precise location and any measurements (ie. how big the hole in the fence, etc.).

F) Hazards

- When a hazard is found, make a detailed note as to its location, size and any other specifics.
- Mark the hazard with caution tape and consider putting up a warning sign. Note approximately when it will be fixed.
- For larger hazards, put up signs announcing the hazard and state that the soccer field or baseball diamond is not to be used until the hazard is fixed and give an approximate time or date.

G) Maintenance

- Perform all maintenance within an appropriate defined time frame.
- The faster maintenance is carried out, the less amount of time there is for incidents to occur.
- Quick and detailed maintenance equals lower risk.

H) Spring Inspections and Maintenance

- Perform a comprehensive spring inspection of all soccer fields and baseball diamonds in your municipality.
- The winter freeze and spring thaw can cause major changes to the ground, so inspect soon after the thaw to ensure the field is safe.
- Check for any hazards and repair them immediately.
- Children are eager to get back to their outdoor sports in the spring and aren't likely to make sure the field is safe before they start.

I) Lighting

- Ensure there is proper lighting around baseball diamonds and soccer fields.
- Some nearby homeowners may complain that the lights around baseball diamond and soccer fields are too bright and cause a glare. It's often thought that if the high poles securing the lights were lower, there would be less of a problem. The opposite is true, the higher the lights the less glare.
- A better solution would be to change the angle of the lights by positioning them to shine downward onto the playing field instead of across it. This will reduce glare and the chance of player injury.
- Proper lighting can greatly reduce injuries and reduce liability exposure.

J) Other Considerations

- Provide adequate and nearby parking for players and game spectators.
- If there is a concession stand, make sure it follows proper procedures for dealing with food and drinks.
- The concession stand should never provide drinks in glass bottles – only in plastic or paper cups. Food should only be served on disposable dinnerware.
- Provide adequate waste receptacles around soccer fields and baseball diamonds.

K) Signage

- Signs should be posted around soccer fields and baseball diamonds and include information such as:
 - Rules of conduct.
 - Alcohol prohibited.
 - Children should be supervised.
 - Location of nearest telephone and that 911 is a free call.
 - Municipal contact number – be sure to acknowledge all calls so that people continue to call in and report problems.
 - Any other warnings.