



Risk Management Considerations for Tobogganing

The rush of sliding down a hill makes tobogganing an outdoor winter activity that both youth and adults enjoy. Although it is a favourite winter pastime, it can also be very dangerous. Every year thousands of people are injured sledding down hills in city parks, streets and resort areas.

There are three main causes of tobogganing accidents:

1. A collision with another sled or vehicle;
2. Loss of control of the equipment; and
3. Falling off of the equipment.

Statistics

- 80% of sledding accidents are predictable and preventable.
- 70% of accidents take place on non-designated hills.
- 51% occur under adult supervision.
- 33% of the accidents result from collisions.
- 28% of accidents are due to falls in icy conditions.
- 16% occur from going off jumps.
- Most injuries occur in the late afternoon and evening.

Managing the Risk

Your organization has a duty, as an occupier, to keep the property in a safe condition to accommodate its intended purpose. In order to ensure safety on sledding hills,

there are a number of steps that can be taken to reduce risk and liability:

Designation of Hills

- Designate specific hills that are for tobogganing.
- Educate the public on which hills are designated.
- Tobogganing hills should have run-offs long enough for the sledder to come to a natural stop.
- Hills should be free from obstacles such as rocks, fences and trees.
- Hills should not end on roads, parking lots, or frozen bodies of water.
- Tobogganing should only be allowed in the evening if the area is well lit.
- Communicate to the community which hills are designated for tobogganing.
- Inspect and maintain the designated hills.

Maintenance and Design of the Hill

- The hill should have six to twelve inches of cover snow prior.
- Hills should have an even surface clear of rocks, brush, trees and knolls.
- Create a protocol for opening and closing the hill. If possible, the hill should be closed at night and following an ice storm.

- To ensure the safety of participants, safe areas should be marked outside of the primary sledding area.
- Hay bales should be placed at all points of impact to lessen the chance of injury.
- Telephones should be located in the area of the hill for emergency use. It can't be assumed that everyone has a cell phone.
- Mechanical means of climbing the hill should be discouraged. The clothing that children generally wear to toboggan, such as scarves, can be easily caught in mechanical lifts and this can cause severe harm.
- Educate the public on the best methods of sledding:
 - Avoid tobogganing on plastic sheets or other materials that can be easily pierced by objects on the ground.
 - Kneeling on the sled provides the best protection.
 - Lying on the stomach can increase the risk of head injuries.
 - Lying on the back can increase the risk of spinal injuries.
 - Roll to the side to get off the sled.
- Work with public health or local schools to teach kids safe tobogganing skills.

Supervision

- On busy days, supervision may be required to ensure safe tobogganing.
- Position spotters at the top and bottom of the hill to help reduce accidents. Have them look for hazards and warn patrons of dangerous behaviour.
- Supervisors can also do "spot-check" inspections of the hill while they supervise, or close down the hill immediately if something is wrong.

Inspections:

- Regular inspection of all tobogganing hills further helps to reduce risk.
- Daily inspections should take place whenever possible.
- Inspectors should check the ground surface of the hill, as well as break up any jumps that may have been built and remove any debris.
- Ensure you document all inspections.
- Hills should be closed if conditions are dangerous.

Education

- Educating the public as to the risks involved with tobogganing and methods of prevention will help to lessen the number of accidents involved in sledding.
- Risk can be reduced by speaking at school assemblies and distributing pamphlets to students and parents on topics such as:
 - Proper clothing.
 - How to safely climb the hill.
 - Signs of frostbite and hypothermia.

Signage

- Signs should be posted around the hill and in the parking lot(s) indicating:
 - Hours of operation.
 - Rules of conduct.
 - Parental supervision required.
 - Helmets strongly recommended.
 - Consumption of alcohol prohibited.
 - Location of nearest telephone.
 - Contact information for your organization.
 - Any other warnings or dangers.
- Ensure that signs are written in simple language so that all participants can understand them.
- For example, use the phrase "Don't build jumps or use jumps" rather than "Avoid construction and use of man-made jumps"

By taking these precautions, you can successfully reduce the risk of accidents and injuries that are common to this winter recreational activity.

While Intact Public Entities Inc. does its best to provide useful general information and guidance on matters of interest to its clients, statutes, regulations and the common law continually change and evolve, vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, and are subject to differing interpretations and opinions. The information provided by Intact Public Entities Inc. is not intended to replace legal or other professional advice or services. The information provided by Intact Public Entities Inc. herein is provided "as is" and without any warranty, either express or implied, as to its fitness, quality, accuracy, applicability or timeliness. Before taking any action, consult an appropriate professional and satisfy yourself about the fitness, accuracy, applicability or timeliness of any information or opinions contained herein. Intact Public Entities Inc. assumes no liability whatsoever for any errors or omissions associated with the information provided herein and furthermore assumes no liability for any decision or action taken in reliance on the information contained in these materials or for any damages, losses, costs or expenses in a way connected to it. Intact Public Entities Inc. is operated by a wholly owned subsidiary of Intact Financial Corporation. Intact Design® and Risk Management Centre of Excellence® are registered trademarks of Intact Financial Corporation or its affiliates. All other trademarks are properties of their respective owners. TM & © 2021 Intact Public Entities Inc. and/or its affiliates. All Rights Reserved.