



Risk Management Considerations for Tours and Open Houses

Some municipal facilities, such as water and sewage plants, fire halls and recreation complexes offer open houses and tours to the public. While they generate interest and excitement, these events can produce liability. There are some concerns that are common to all tours and then some specific types of buildings have their own set of special considerations.

Risk Management Considerations

Age Appropriateness

- Consider the ages of those to be accommodated at any open house or tour.
- Children should not be exposed to moving equipment or toxic chemicals. This can include a sewage or water plant (the entire building) or the refrigeration area of an arena.

Staffing

- Staffing considerations should be based on the number of visitors. The type of group (children vs. adults) and facility (arena vs. treatment plant) also plays a part in how many staff members are needed.
- “Off limits” to the public also means off limits to friends and family of employees when on a tour.
- Staff must maintain control over the group at all times.

- If using volunteers to run the tour or open house, consider whether they need additional training. If training isn't possible, use paid staff or partner staff with volunteers for added coverage.

Safety Equipment

- Depending on the facility, guests should, as a minimum, wear safety vests. It helps to identify visitors and keep them together as a group.
- Vests also help other staff intercept visitors, if they wander off or find themselves in an off limits area.
- Depending on the facility, hard hats, safety glasses, hearing protection and safety boots may be required.

Railings and Shields

- Before the tour or open house, check the railings and shields around the facility. Are they sturdy and tight? A loose rail can result in a nasty fall and injury.
- Are the rails suitable for children visiting the facility? Most rails are installed with adults in mind.
- Are shields in place around moving equipment?
- Special fencing may have to be installed to keep guests away from certain areas. Fencing can be effectively used to allow guests into the room but prevent them from wandering or touching certain equipment.

Floor Surfaces

- Falls represent one of the highest risk problems of a tour or open house. If floors are inherently wet or slippery, they should be avoided or sectioned off.
- Trips are also a risk problem. Damaged, broken or uneven flooring should be repaired and made level before any guests are allowed on it.

Access

- Is the facility wheelchair friendly? Legislation in Ontario requires public areas to be accessible. Since most tours take guests “behind the scenes” to private areas, some guests may have a problem with accessibility.

Allergies

- Some guests may experience a reaction to fumes in areas where paint or chemicals are used. Inform people of the potential for an allergic reaction to chemicals prior to beginning the tour.

Devices with Cameras

- Guests should leave devices with cameras in a safe place prior to beginning the tour.
- Offer guests a brochure that captures all of the highlights of the tour.
- Anything photographed, whether it be sensitive in nature or not, is now out of your control. The photograph has the potential to end up anywhere at any time.

Specific Concerns

Water/Sewer Plants

- Water on the floor.
- Appropriateness of barriers.
- Accessibility.
- Age of guests.
- Controls/computers must be “off limits”. One child touching a keyboard could change your entire process.

Fire Halls

- Children should not climb on or in emergency vehicles.
- Keys should be removed from vehicles.
- Children should not wear firefighter’s gear or be allowed to touch nozzles, axes or other equipment.
- No one should be permitted to slide down the fire pole, if there is one in the facility.
- Water must be mopped up and all equipment should be removed from the apparatus bay.
- Have a plan in place to handle guests should an emergency call come in during the open house or tour.

Police

- Guests should not be allowed in sensitive areas.
- Children should not be placed in a jail cell.
- Cameras and cellphones should be banned from the tour.
- The tour should not include going through the 911 centre, if there is one at the facility.
- Keys should be removed from vehicles.
- Have a plan in place to handle guests should an emergency call come in during the open house or tour.

Arenas and Recreation Centres

- Keep the tour small and together. These are buildings that guests can and do visit anytime and some will think they know their way around already.
- Restrict the number of children allowed into the “working areas”.
- Do not allow anyone to ride on the ice re-surfacer.
- If there is a swimming pool area, view it through a window. One person accidentally falling into the pool or slipping on some water is a huge risk.

Supervision

If a child has to leave the tour to use the washroom, the child must be taken by a responsible adult.

Check with Human Resources to determine if criminal background checks are required for your staff as a result of offering tours involving vulnerable persons.

The responsibility for safety rests with the group conducting the tour. You may have to bring in additional staff, or if the tour is for a school, then special arrangements should be made with the school.

Prior to the tour you should have a short meeting with the supervisors or participating staff to tell them what they can expect and what is required of them.

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