



## Ice Rink Safety

Ice rinks are one of the leading sources of winter-time recreational activity in the United States. Unfortunately, they can also be a leading source of injury when used unsafely. Studies conducted as early as 2002 showed that, in a single year, more than 13,700 children from ages 5 to 14 received emergency room treatment for ice skating-related injuries.<sup>1</sup>

A study published in 2004 by *Pediatrics* revealed that, of 60 consecutive children who were evaluated in an emergency room for ice skating-related injuries, nearly 80% of them were not wearing protective equipment when the injury occurred. The majority of the injuries were to the head and face. About 68% of the head injuries were direct lacerations – a percentage that is greater than both in-line skating and roller skating head lacerations.<sup>2</sup> For these reasons and more, it is important that best practices as well as state and local safety regulations are followed when using ice rinks.



### SAFETY AND RULES

- It is recommended that all skaters wear protective equipment while using the ice rink (e.g., helmets, elbow pads, knee pads, etc.).
- Skaters should ensure that their ice skates fit comfortably, have sharpened blades, and provide adequate ankle support. Laces should be double-knotted.
- Ice rinks should be available for use only at designated times when adult supervision by a “skate guard” can be performed. Do not allow unsupervised skating. It is recommended that one skate guard be assigned per 25-30 skaters.
- Hourly inspect the ice for cracks, holes, or melting even when the ice is in use. If necessary, pause the activity to perform these inspections. Advise skaters to be aware of and immediately report any cracks, holes, or melting. If these problems are observed, immediately instruct skaters to exit the rink, and cease skating activities until repairs are made.
- Skaters should be able to perform basic skating maneuvers before using the ice. If a skater lacks experience, s/he should be accompanied by an adult supervisor.
- Tricks and stunts (e.g., jumping, pair lifting, camel spins, etc.) should not be allowed.
- Ice rinks should not be overcrowded; supervisors should judge whether skaters have adequate space between them and reduce the number of skaters as necessary.
- Instruct skaters to watch out for each other – use the “buddy system”.

<sup>1</sup> National Safe Kids Campaign (NSKC), *Recreational Injury Fact Sheet*. Washington (DC): NSKC, 2004. Available at: [http://www.usa.safekids.org/tier3\\_cd.cfm?folder\\_id=540&content\\_item\\_id=9530](http://www.usa.safekids.org/tier3_cd.cfm?folder_id=540&content_item_id=9530) , accessed on March 10, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> McGeehan, Shields, and Smith, “Children Should Wear Helmets While Ice-Skating: A Comparison of Skating-Related Injuries,” *Pediatrics*, Vol. 114 No. 1 July 2004, pp. 124-128

- Skaters should be taught how to fall properly before using the ice rink. When falling, a skater should:
  - Stay as loose as possible to prevent broken bones.
  - Fall onto hands or arms if possible to avoid direct head impact.

After a fall has occurred, a skater should:

- Rise up as quickly as possible.
- Keep extremities close to his/her body to prevent injury from other blades.
- Announce loudly that s/he has fallen so that other skaters are aware of his/her location.

Skaters should watch for, and guard the area surrounding, fallen peers to prevent collisions until the fallen peer can safely rise up.

- Horseplay (e.g., throwing snowballs, wrestling) and other inappropriate behavior should not be allowed on the rink. Instruct skaters to refrain from skating at excessive speeds and to skate carefully and courteously at all times.
- Skaters should be advised to listen carefully for any announcements or instructions issued by the skate guard(s).
- Skaters who wish to rest should exit the rink; sitting and standing still in the rink should be prohibited.

## **SIGNAGE**

- Clearly visible “Ice Rink Open” and “Ice Rink Closed” signs should be posted as necessary. At all times, one or the other should be posted.
- Examples of other signs to post include:
  - “Skating is Prohibited Without Adult Supervision”
  - “No Jumping Allowed”
  - “No Food or Drinks Allowed”
  - “Skates Must be Worn When Using Rink”
  - “No Sitting Allowed in Rink”

## **MAINTENANCE**

- Initial inspections should be performed with each new use of the rink. Items to check include melting areas, cracks, holes, litter and debris, uneven surfaces, and rough spots. All repairs and maintenance should be performed prior to skating activities.
- Rinks should be hosed down when necessary to prevent melting, and ice resurfacers or scrapers should be used when necessary to flatten and smooth the ice.
- If there are areas of the ice rink covered by snow, use a shovel or scraper to remove the snow as soon as possible. Snow can act as an insulator and melt the ice.
- Ensure that the perimeters of the rink are clearly marked and visible at all times.

*This Alliant Risk Control Consulting fact sheet is not intended to be exhaustive. The discussion and best practices suggested herein should not be regarded as legal advice. Readers should pursue legal counsel or contact their insurance providers to gain more exhaustive advice.*

**For more information on this topic, please contact Alliant Risk Control Consulting at (949) 260-5042 or [riskcontrol@alliant.com](mailto:riskcontrol@alliant.com)**