

Temporary Ice Skating Rinks

Temporary ice skating rinks have become a recent popular outdoor recreation trend. These rinks are generally low-cost to construct and can be a safer alternative than allowing skating on a local pond or lake. The rinks are generally constructed in a flat field, with easy access, and are typically near a park or school with good lighting. Construction varies from simpler rinks where plastic is laid down to protect the grass, and wood timbers are used like concrete forms to shape the ice, to rinks where kits can be purchased with interlocking, self-leveling floor panels and sideboards that look similar to permanent ice rinks. Most rinks are constructed in November, flooded in December, used in January and February, and then dismantled in March. Below are some risk management considerations for your temporary ice skating rink.



Understanding Your Exposures

Installation

Who will install the rink? Volunteers or a professional contractor? The answer may depend on the type of rink you are installing. Some ice skating rink kits are designed for "do it yourself" installation and are fairly easy to construct. However, if using wood timbers or forms, it may be best to hire a contractor with the experience to help ensure a smooth and flat finish to the ice. If a contractor is used, be sure to require a certificate of insurance and name your entity as an additional insured on their policy.

Inadequate Maintenance & Inspections

Depending on the type of rink and the weather, the ongoing maintenance requirements will vary. The ice may require a top coat from time to time, to ensure a smooth skate or to fill in cracks. Snow will need to be removed in a way that does not cause damage to the ice. If sideboards are installed they may require adjusting to ensure they are secure, sturdy and that the gates are functioning properly. No matter the construction it is a good idea to inspect the ice and any equipment on regular basis. Document all inspections and follow up on any issues identified in a timely manner. If a safety issue is identified then close the rink until it can be repaired. Additionally, any injuries or incidents reported should be investigated and followed up on if necessary with corrective action to prevent re-occurrence.

Location

The location of the rink should be considered carefully to allow for adequate lighting and accessibility. Skating at night should only be permitted if adequate lighting can be supplied to the rink. If not, the rink should be limited to daylight hours only. Although the rink is temporary, the rink should be accessible with entrance areas as free from slip/fall hazards as possible. Other considerations should include, the proximity to school grounds and if the rink will be a distraction to students during class. If the rink is located on school grounds, will they permit use during school hours? If the rink is located at a park, is it far enough away from playgrounds, sledding hills, etc, so they will not cause additional hazards? Can emergency responders access the rink quickly in the event of an injury?

Hockey

In most cases if a skating rink is in the planning stages, it was motivated with an end user group in mind. This most likely will be for those who want to free skate however it is prudent to plan for all potential users in order to avoid conflict and injuries to the skaters. If hockey is to be permitted on the rink, it is best to set aside a separate time for pick up hockey and free skating. This will help to avoid injuries by a stray hockey puck or hockey stick. If hockey is to be permitted it is best to provide goals as opposed to allowing the public to bring in and install their own. In fact, it is best to remove any outside equipment or materials found on the rink as soon as possible. This equipment can damage the ice causing a trip hazard to the skaters.

Free Skate?

From a risk management perspective, one of the most important decisions involved with providing a new recreational space for residents is whether or not to charge a fee as a means to help offset any costs, in this case, associated with the rink installation. Most states have laws regarding recreational use and protections from liability in the event of any damages or injuries suffered while recreating on public land. However, most of these laws only apply when a fee is not charged for the use of this space. The same restrictions may apply for any City/Town sponsored skating lessons or hockey leagues. Some exceptions exist but it is best to consult with your counsel before charging any fees.

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