

Design Gyms for Safety

Gymnasiums are the location for a significant number of claims, the cause of which usually falls into two categories: poor design or lack of supervision.

Slip and falls are the most frequent cause of injury. Dirt or water on the floor can be extremely slippery, especially when children are running. Sources of water include a leaky roof, spilled drinks, sweat, condensation from air conditioning vents, or water fountains. In light of a 2001 court decision (*Ortega v. Kmart*), it's important for all youth programs to establish a documented inspection schedule for the gymnasium and to clean up any fluids on the floor quickly.

Many programs will spend \$100,000 on a floor, but not invest in a well designed roof. Claims for gym roofs blown off in storms usually result in higher costs for water damage than replacing the roof. Insulation tiles along the roof are frequently damaged by basketballs or volley balls. Poorly selected lighting fixtures are frequently broken, resulting in a glass hazard and insufficient lighting.

One of the most dangerous areas of any gymnasium is the bleachers. Falls from horsing around have frequently resulted in fractured bones and other injuries. Remind staff that supervising youth in the gym includes kids on the bleachers. If the bleachers are the collapsible type, it's a good practice to lock them shut whenever possible to eliminate the hazard.

Some of the most serious gym injuries reported to Markel have been to bystanders. In one claim, a student was studying near the basketball court and was accidentally kicked in the face by one of the players.

Many gymnasiums have activity rooms or offices adjacent to court area. Often there are shatterproof windows on these that permit people outside to see in, which reduces locations where child abuse or other mischief can occur. It works fine until staff cover up the windows with posters and notices.

Another hazard in many gyms is the practice of leaving the gym doors open on hot days. This practice not only leaves your facility open to uninvited guests, it increases your risk of losing a child who does belong. Have these doors wired to the fire alarm and post an "emergency exit – fire alarm will sound when opened" sign on the door.