

Safety Checking Your Martial Arts School

Conducting a periodic analysis of your school's operational policies helps to maintain a safe environment for your students. Key areas to consider include:

Sign-in/out procedures: This valuable practice lets you know who is in your school at all times, especially if you have a large, multi-room facility. Before you close for the evening, check to be sure everyone has left. If you hold birthday parties or sleepovers, use the sign-in/ out procedure to validate that participants have signed event waivers. For after-school programs, meet the bus when it arrives and list the children's names attending your program. Have the bus driver sign-off that the children were transferred to your care. A sign-in/out procedure can also serve as a list of potential witnesses for claim investigations; this can be important when it is difficult to recall facts about a specific incident.

Hazing policies: Hazing typically occurs when tenured students indoctrinate new students into their group. Hazing often leads to child-to-child sexual abuse allegations. Hazing should never be allowed. Your written policy should communicate this expectation to students and parents.

Cell phone use and unauthorized photography:

The use of cell phones, cameras, and camcorders should be prohibited inside your school, particularly in bathrooms and locker rooms. You can provide designated areas, such as lobbies, for cell phone use. Establish specific events and times for parents to take pictures of their children. If you are planning an advertising event that may include pictures of students, obtain a minor's photo release from the children's parents before you use their photographs.

Safety inspections: Having a documented safety inspection program is a great way to show you are doing everything necessary to maintain a safe martial arts environment. It's important to perform—and document—the following inspections:

- **Hourly:** Inspect bathrooms and walkways. Look for and clean up moisture and tripping hazards.
- **Daily:** Inspect parking lots, parent observation areas, and lobbies for tripping hazards. Make sure floor mats are clean and stabilized, with no separation between adjoining mats. Check punching bags and training gear, and discard any gear that is damaged. Review manufacturer's recommendations for care and maintenance of equipment and use their guidelines as your checklist.

Once you have established safety inspection guidelines, it is important to conduct inspections as scheduled. Communicate your expectations to your instructors so they can help you maintain a safe school.

If you have a safety or risk management question or a suggestion for a topic, please contact Markel's Risk Management Department at safety1st@markelcorp.com.