

Challenge Course Staff Training

Several years ago, Markel began to require an annual inspection of challenge courses and climbing towers by a Professional Vendor Member (PVM) of the Association for Challenge Course Technology (ACCT). As with many new requirements, there was a couple of years' transition period before this requirement became readily accepted within the camping community. ACCT has been accredited by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) as a standards developer, and is working toward submitting challenge course standards for ANSI accreditation.

ACCT is now in the process of developing standards for Facilitator Certification. Anyone who has worked with challenge courses and climbing walls for an extended period of time knows that most injuries are a result of human error, not equipment. There are many factors to consider when developing facilitator training certification, including:

- How will the course be used and what populations will be served?
- What is the prior experience of facilitators?
- Will the facilitator be certified for other courses at different locations?
- How long will the certification last?
- What are the qualifications of those who train facilitators? At this time, it is not clear what the capacity of training organizations will be. Will facilitators of climbing walls be trained differently than facilitators of high-ropes courses?
- Will different levels of training be available for those who operate summer camps as opposed to those who operate year-round programs?

There are many details for the ACCT to work out before presenting such a certification program to the public. What does Markel think about facilitator certification? It has some pros and cons. First, a minimum standard curriculum will probably improve the facilitator training across the board (which is good). The length of training time for facilitators is likely to increase for many camps, which is good in terms of safety and developmental outcomes, but not so good in terms of keeping training costs down.

Facilitator certification is coming. There will likely be a couple years of transition while the kinks get worked out and people agree on a minimum curriculum. Here are a few suggestions to consider implementing this summer:

- Start documenting facilitator experience (in hours) for your facilitators. There may be a way for experienced facilitators to "challenge in" via written and skills testing.
- Talk to your challenge course PVM. Find out what they suggest for transitioning your facilitator staff over the next three years.
- Talk to other camp directors in your area about sharing the costs of a facilitator training. You may get much higher quality training for fewer dollars if you can join forces.

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.