

RISK COMMUNIQUÉ

Fitness Center Use

Many faith based organizations promote wellness in a variety of ways such as health screenings and fitness incentives. Although this may be a positive benefit for staff and church members and a way to encourage healthy lifestyles, there are consequences to consider and proactive risk management strategies that should be considered.

Possible benefits of facility fitness areas include:

- Improved health and fitness for church members and staff.
- Community building, increased morale, camaraderie, fun and convenience.
- Staff and membership retention.

Potential risks of allowing fitness facility use by employees include:

- Injuries from unsafe use.
- A potential for an increase in harassment or other claims and lawsuits due to increased use of the facilities.
- Inadequate supervision of fitness center users.

Risk Reduction Considerations

Establish clear procedures that address:

- Hours of use.
- Staffing, if applicable.
- Pre-approval/registration process, including a signed waiver that clearly states fitness center users take personal responsibility for any injuries.
- Fitness center rules - provide all users with a copy rules upon registration and on an annual basis, and have them sign off that they received a copy.
- Requiring approval of medical doctor for use of the center by anyone over the age of 50.
- Restrict use of weight machines and free weights by anyone under the age of 16; require parental approval for anyone ages 16 – 18.
- Instructions for appropriate use of room and each piece of equipment.
- Cleaning of equipment, including frequency and type of cleaning agent.
- Recommendation to utilize a “buddy system” when accessing fitness center and equipment, if staff is not present.
- What to do in the event of a medical emergency.
- Periodic checks of the fitness center and any changing rooms to make sure there is no delay in response should someone need assistance when utilizing the fitness center alone.
- Consideration to place a portable “panic” button in the center in case assistance is needed in an emergency.

*A technical reference bulletin by the Risk Control
Services Department of the Glatfelter Insurance Group*



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- Consideration for supplying an automatic external defibrillator available for use in the fitness center.
- Posting of emergency numbers and access to a telephone.

Conclusion

While you may want to encourage congregation members and staff to keep fit, it's important for each faith-based organization to determine if the benefits are worth the risk before initiating a fitness center.