

Campus Recreation Centers: An Examination of Security Issues

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INTRODUCTION

Providing proper and adequate security is a critical element in comprehensive risk management for campus recreation facilities. However, little research has been done in this area to assess and analyze the current status of campus recreation center security in the United States. The purpose of this study was to (a) examine facility security procedures and personnel, and (b) determine the most common types of security incidents that occur in these centers. The institutions used in the study were members of the National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association (NIRSA) and all were four-year public institutions in the United States. Questionnaires were mailed to 100 randomly selected campus recreation directors across the United States. 58 usable surveys were returned for a 58% response rate. Different sections represented different categories so that the questionnaire was effectively divided into four sections. The four sections included security policy and procedure, security equipment, facility access-control, and criminal activity in recreation center.

Findings of the research indicated the following: 1) most of the recreation centers had a current written security policy and procedures manual that also included the risk management plan for the facility but slightly over 33% updated their security plan every year; 2) all of the study population facilities retrained their staff members at least once per year but slightly more than 50% reported they required their employees to be certified in CPR/First Aid/First Response; 3) training sessions included emergency action but not conflict resolution procedures; 4) illegal entry was identified as the primary criminal activity followed by theft, vandalism, fights and sexual harassment; 5) most reported that their facility was not designed with a security plan in mind; 6) most of the respondents did not have their employed staff check identification cards; and 7) less than 50% reported the use of security alarm systems for non-supervised exits.

AN EXAMINATION OF SECURITY ISSUES IN CAMPUS RECREATION CENTERS

Although an owner or occupier is not considered an insurer of the safety of his or her invitees, a duty does exist to use reasonable care to protect the patrons from foreseeable injuries. The owner or occupier also must protect them against dangerous conditions on the premises that he or she has actual or constructive knowledge of, and is required to keep the property reasonably safe (*Holder v. Mellon*, 1998; *Montes v. Indian Cliffs Ranch, Inc.*, 1997). A duty to protect against the criminal acts of a third party will not be generally imposed, unless the defendant had specific control over the security of the premises where the criminal act took place (*Triplex Communications v. Riley*, 1995). The organization (owner or occupier), who retains control over the security and safety of the premises owes a duty to use ordinary care to protect the patrons against an unreasonable and foreseeable risk of harm from the criminal acts of a third party (*Centeq Realty v. Siegler*, 1995). As the owner of a campus recreation center, a university in general, and campus recreation center director specifically, must be able to identify safety and security issues that could conceivably cause losses and jeopardize the safety of the staff, patrons, and property.

In order to counteract these problems, the campus recreation director must possess knowledge and understanding about appropriate risk management techniques. Appenzeller (1985) wrote that the primary considerations of a risk management plan are to (a) prevent property damage or destruction, (b) reduce the number of participant injuries, and (c) develop a loss-reduction program. Arnold (1989) stated that risk management “. . . may be the best defense yet against the consequences of inadequate supervision” (p.71). Therefore, a risk management program, at its most basic concept, must be proactive in providing security to the patron (Gary & McKinstrey, 1994).

Security measures employed depend on the type of facility, the size of the university/college and the location of the facility. Knowing these unique characteristics and challenges may determine the type of security required.

Appearance and function are sometimes balanced against cost, but a suitable balance can be found. Individuals utilizing recreation centers should be able to exercise with the knowledge that the environment is safe. In this study security in a recreation center was defined as providing the patrons and their property with appropriate security measures in order to provide a safe environment.

Proper security management for campus recreational facilities can save money and insure greater safety for staff and participants. Patton (1997) indicated that effective facility security and control might positively impact safety, reduce theft and vandalism and help control maintenance. Security issues in recreation facilities must be addressed in the early stages of building design or reconstruction. Stolovitch (1995) suggested that security design should not be considered as an add-on as this can result in increased cost and vulnerability to potential security-related lawsuits.

The security process addressed in the early stages of building design can identify security concerns ranging from equipment placement to access control. To effectively address the security process, the director and university officials should develop policy and procedure manuals that clearly outline security concerns. Often, securing a recreation center is as simple as applying common-sense strategies and clear procedural planning.

There are two primary security components that should be addressed in any campus recreation facility: people and procedures. People in the campus recreation center include administration, student workers, volunteers, participants, visitors, staff, and maintenance personnel. Procedures include the policies and regulations that people must follow in order for the facility to function smoothly. The combination of people with appropriate training and procedures that address security management continually, are essential building blocks of facility safety.

PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

The purpose of this study was to (a) examine recreation facility security procedures and personnel, and (b) examine the most common types of security incidents that occur in campus recreation centers.

PROCEDURE

The institutions used in the study were members of the National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association and all were four-year public institutions in the United States. A questionnaire was developed for this study and a pilot study was conducted to determine the questionnaire clarity and the ease with which directors of campus recreation centers could complete the questionnaire. Based on the literature and two experts (campus recreation directors) a 39-item questionnaire was developed. Different sections represented different categories so that the questionnaire was effectively divided into four sections. The four sec-

tions included security policy and procedure, security equipment, facility access-control, and criminal activity in recreation center.

A pilot study was initially conducted testing the questionnaire. The pilot study involved sending 10 surveys to randomly selected university recreation campus directors throughout the United States, who possessed knowledge of their facility's security. As a result of suggested changes or additions to questions presented to the individuals in the pilot survey, modifications were then made. After making these modifications to the questionnaire, a total of 100 ($n = 100$) randomly selected campus recreation centers across the United States received questionnaires. A contact person (recreation director) was mailed a letter of explanation, a five-page, four section, 39-item questionnaire instrument and a business-reply envelope. Because of the diverse responsibilities of campus recreation staff, the directors were asked to have the individual specifically responsible for security complete the survey. 65 of the 100 mailed questionnaires were returned and 58 were usable for a rate of 58% (seven were unusable because they were not completely filled out). The demographic breakdown of the schools from which individuals returned questionnaires included 16 with 20,000 students or more, 22 with 10,000 to 19,999 students, and 20 with 2,500 to 9,999 students. All the data was analyzed and reported using descriptive statistics.

FINDINGS

The results of this study identified primary sources of safety and security for the responding campus recreation centers and provided insightful data into the extent of security issues. Data from this survey may provide important information as to security systems used and why there is limited security in campus recreation centers.

Policies and Procedures

Security is a never-ending process. It must be scrutinized and updated on a daily basis. Of the usable returned responses, 60% of the recreation centers had a current written security policy and procedures manual that also included the risk management plan for the facility. However, only 38% of these responses disclosed that they updated their security plan every year. Thus, it may be inferred that while the majority of respondents did possess a written security policy and procedure plan, most of the respondents in this study do not implement recommended security procedures for their facilities (Peterson & Hronek, 1997; Sawyer & Smith, 1999). 40% of the respondents revealed that their security plan

is modified for different types of events inside and outside of the recreation center.

TABLE 1: POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

	n	%
Written Security Plan	34	60%
Update Security Plan	22	38%
Modify Security Plan for Events	23	40%
Identify Conflict Resolution Methods in Security Plan	8	13%

Although this is often necessary, due to the peculiar or unique characteristics of any event, modification for each individual event can often lead to confusion in the implementation of an effective risk management security plan.

Staff Training Procedures

One of the most cost efficient and effective means for providing security is appropriate personnel identification. To that end, 88% of the respondents required their employees to wear appropriate T-shirts identifying them as employees of the recreation center. However, simple identification does not mean that the staff member is prepared for emergencies. The data analyzed showed that 91% of the recreation centers have formal staff training sessions. These training sessions include emergency action but not conflict resolution procedures. The data also revealed that 64% of the respondents re-trained their employees in emergency procedures every six months while 36% retrained their employees each new academic year. Thus, all of the study population facilities retrained their staff members at least once per year. Interestingly, only 52% of the respondents reported that they required their employees to be certified in CPR/First Aid/First Response.

TABLE 2: STAFF TRAINING PROCEDURES

Training Procedure	# of Facilities	%
Facility T-shirts required	52	88%
Formal Training Sessions	53	91%
Retrained employees every 6 months.	33	64%
Retrained employees once per year.	20	36%
CPR/First Aid/First Response	30	52%
Conflict Resolution/Security Response Training	12	21%

64% of the estimated number of staff members of the facility, which did not include administration or secretarial members, were between the ages of 17-23.

TABLE 3: AGE OF FACILITY STAFF

Age	Estimated Total	n	%
17-19	785	254	32%
20-21	785	237	32%
22-23	785	145	18%
24-25	785	81	10%
Above 25	785	68	8%

This relative youth coupled with insufficient understanding and/or training of conflict resolution may increase the likelihood of uncertainty when a potentially threatening situation presents itself. Therefore, it may be inferred that although the facilities required emergency procedure training, conflict resolution and/or security response training procedures or certifications are not mandated.

Criminal Activity in Recreation Centers

Respondents were asked to identify those criminal activities that have occurred the most in their recreation center within the past year. 65% of the respondents identified illegal entry into the facility as the primary criminal activity at their facility. Theft was ranked second (43%), followed by vandalism (23%), fights (13%) and (5%) sexual harassment.

TABLE 4: RANKING OF CRIMINAL ACTIVITY IN RECREATION CENTERS

	n	%
Illegal Entry	37	65%
Theft	25	43%
Vandalism	13	23%
Fights	7	13%
Sexual Harassment	3	5%

When asked whether any of the criminal activities contributed to any of the other criminal activities cited, 95% of the population answered in the affirmative that illegal entry contributed greatly to the other activities cited.

TABLE 5: ESTIMATED RELATIONSHIPS OF CRIMINAL ACTIVITIES IN RECREATION CENTERS

	%
Illegal Entry to Others	83%
Theft to Others	10%
Vandalism to Others	3%
Fights to Others	2%
Sexual Harassment to Others	2%

Access-Control

Controlled-access of passageways with localized or centralized door alarms can be an effective deterrent to unauthorized access (Patton, 1997). 92% of the respondents indicated that a system was in place to track facility keys. 36% reported that their facility was designed with a security plan in mind. Respondents were to identify which methods they used for patron access to the recreation facility. 64% of the respondents used only identification card scanners for patron access to their facility. 36% of the respondents revealed that in addition to scanners, they also employed staff to check identification cards. Alarming, only 47% of the respondents reported the use of security alarm systems for non-supervised exits.

TABLE 6: RECREATION FACILITY CONTROL-ACCESS

	N	%
Facility Design with Security in Mind	21	36%
ID Access	37	64%
ID Checked by Staff Member	21	36%
Alarm System for Non-supervised exits	27	47%
Track Facility Keys	53	92%

It may be inferred that the lack of a facility staff member able to put a face with a name as patrons enter the facility, may be an invitation for individuals to illegally enter the premises. Additionally, by not employing security alarms in non-supervised areas illegal entry may be encouraged. It is not surprising that illegal entry was cited as the most frequent criminal activity in this study as most of the recreation centers do not employ staff to check facility entrants or entrances nor is the facility designed to prevent such an occurrence.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings regarding security policies and procedures were interesting. 60% of the recreation centers have written policy and procedure manuals, but only 38% actually updated them annually. This was somewhat surprising considering that this is a primary issue that must be addressed in the overall security management of campus recreation centers. Additional information that must be included in the policy and procedure manual should be the area of conflict resolution. Unhappy patrons often will not only avoid leaving, they may try to get even as well (Stier, 1999).

Most of the campus recreation facility employees were identified to be college students between the ages of 17-23. It is unlikely that these young people possess the experience and understanding necessary to diffuse a potentially threatening situation. The campus recreation director can make tremendous strides in decreasing criminal activity and increasing patron satisfaction and safety by incorporating appropriate conflict resolution methods into the facility's policy and procedure manual and staff in-service training. Curiously, although all of the respondents required their employees to participate in re-training, certification in such areas as CPR and rescue breathing was not required. Disabled student/participant policy, contingency plans, emergency action plans, annual review of the security plan, and the investigation process of criminal activ-

ity should also be included into the facility's security policy and procedure manual.

When we explored the various criminal activities, an overwhelming number of respondents reported illegal entry as the major security issue. This finding supported a previous study (Watkins-Miller, 1999) that emphasized the importance of access-control to a facility.

Within the sample of this study, less than 50% of the respondents did not have alarm systems on non-supervised doors. This evidence supports the assertion that people consider committing a crime when they are confident of success (Cook, 1995). The perception of a successful criminal opportunity increases significantly if the location is unguarded. This isolation provides the perpetrator a quick and easy exit from unsupervised areas.

Patton (1997) suggested that the number of entrance and exit points in a recreation facility should be minimal (as long as it meets building code requirements), have easy flow, and always have security alarm systems for non-supervised doors.

In a recent decision in which a student was raped, the court of appeals for the State of Minnesota held that the school district's decision *not* to have a security policy was *not* a discretionary decision that was entitled to statutory immunity. *S.W. v. Spring Lake School District*, 1997, p. 372. The Court of Appeals also held that the employee's decision not to report the presence of an intruder to the school office was entitled to statutory immunity and that the district was not entitled to vicarious immunity for the employees' actions. *S.W.*, p. 373.

In another case, *Bearman v. University of Notre Dame* (1983), the third district court of appeals of Indiana, noted that an operator of a public place generally "owes a duty to keep the premises safe for its invitees . . . the invitor is not the insurer of the invitee's safety . . . [b]efore liability may be imposed on invitor, it must have actual or constructive knowledge of the danger." (p. 1198). The court of appeals held that Notre Dame had a duty to do all it could reasonably do to protect the patrons from injuries caused by the acts of a third party. (*Bearman*, p. 1198). As a result, a public organization such as a campus recreation center would not be protected by statutory immunity nor vicarious immunity if knowledge existed that non-supervised entrances/exits did not have alarm systems and an intruder who perpetrated the criminal activity entered the premises through the non-supervised entrance.

Our research also provides evidence that there is limited foreseeability regarding security protocol in many college and university recreation centers. Good security may be accomplished in two ways: the construc-

tion of a facility that strongly considers maximum security and the adoption of an administrative strategy for the direction and control of all individuals using the building (Sawyer and Smith, 1999).

36% of the recreation centers surveyed were designed with security as an afterthought. Designing a facility to minimize security should not burden the budget. Suggestions for the development of a secure facility include suitable lighting in the facility and parking lot areas, elimination of angled corridors, inclusion of a closed circuit monitoring system, and the inclusion of an alarm system that announces any illegal entries. Appropriate facility design will positively impact safety and reduce criminal activity. This is a challenge for facility directors and campus leaders. They should remain vigilant in their effort to design, build and operate recreation facilities that are secure from criminal activities, and are inviting to students, staff and participants.

It is incumbent upon the recreation facility administrator to communicate the importance of checking the patron's identification card personally to ensure that the name of the person and the face of the person match. 64% of this study found that the facility requires identification without an employee check. Often, patrons lose their identification cards or have them stolen without reporting this promptly. Should this situation occur, an illegal entry is a strong possibility. Knowing which and why certain access areas are particularly vulnerable to illegal entry should be of foremost concern to the recreation facility administrator. If there is a question or concern as to the likelihood of an illegal entry the facility administrator should not hesitate to close that area.

Another way to prevent illegal entry is to have in place a procedure to track facility keys. The respondents in this study were found to be very conscientious in tracking keys to the facility. Directly identifying who possesses keys to which areas and holding that person accountable for the keys should accomplish this. By fulfilling these objectives, other potentially related criminal activities identified in this study would be avoided. As a recommendation, policy and procedure manuals should include an updated security plan that addresses all types of access control to the facility.

These recommendations are only starting points; an institution should construct security procedures that are suitable for its specific environment. The ultimate success of any effective security system depends on the clear vision of recreation facility administrators with a focus on patron safety. Strong commitment and communication with the staff in implementing and enforcing a security plan can make participa-

tion in recreation one of the most enjoyable and satisfying experiences at the university/college for the patron.

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