

BMX Facilities – “Managing the Extreme”

What is BMX All About?

BMX stands for Bicycle Motocross. It began in the late 1960's on vacant lots in California by kids on bicycles imitating motocross riders. In the last decade, the popularity of BMX riding has grown immensely. It's become such a popular sport that it debuted as an Olympic sport at the 2008 Beijing Games.

In Canada, the trend is no different and BMX bike sales are on the rise. Along with BMX bikes come the different “parks” that kids use for riding. Some BMX enthusiasts ride in skateboard parks while others build their own “parks” on private or municipal property. In order to decrease the amount of “rogue” parks being built on their property, many municipalities are building BMX facilities.

What is a BMX Facility?

A BMX facility is an artificially developed course that incorporates a variety of dirt tracks and jumps at various levels of difficulty. The ideal locale is one with suitable soil, slope, drainage and a water supply for jump construction and repair. The site should be visible (prevent vandalism), located near washrooms, have ample parking, be easily accessible for emergency vehicles, built away from busy roads and not too close to residential areas.

What Are The Risks?

All sports facilities have risks and BMX parks are no exception. Potential liability exposures exist for injury to participants, bystanders and spectators. Liability can arise because of improper design and maintenance, lack of inspection and supervision, inappropriate signage, lack of facility rules and failure to warn of dangerous conditions.

Managing The Risks

A comprehensive risk management process can go a long way to mitigate many of the risks associated with BMX facilities. The process should incorporate planning, design, consultations with the user community and biking associations, regular inspection and maintenance, effective signage, clearly outlined facility rules and proper documentation.

The Risk Management Process – Some Considerations

1) Begin by choosing an appropriate site – not just “any site”.

- 2) Hire an experienced designer and work with them from start to finish. An experienced designer will have good working knowledge of safety features and how to incorporate these features into the design.
- 3) Enter into a contract with the designer. The contract should include a Hold Harmless/Indemnification Clause as well as a requirement for a Commercial General Liability Policy and Errors & Omissions Insurance. This allows for a contractual transfer of the risks involved in design.
- 4) If a third party is building the park, enter into a formalized agreement that includes a Hold Harmless/Indemnification Clause and a requirement for Commercial General Liability and Environmental Coverage. Transfer the construction risks.
- 5) Engage your BMX and local biking community to share their thoughts on the design. Let them speak with the designer so they can get a feel for what is and isn't possible. If they understand what can and can't be incorporated into the design, they might be discouraged from trying to redesign certain aspects after the facility is completed.
- 6) Continue to engage this community into the process to build a strong support system. While building skateboard parks, some municipalities encouraged skateboarders to host fund-raising events to assist in the funding of their parks. This helped to create a community of skateboarders that were tied to their facility and its upkeep.
- 7) Develop a regular inspection schedule and a maintenance system.
- 8) Document each inspection and any completed maintenance.
- 9) Develop facility rules to oversee the operation of the facility.
- 10) Post your facility rules in visible locations. We recommend that signage be geared towards the level of understanding of the user group. Incorporate their “lingo”. Use pictures.
- 11) Consult with other municipalities who have built such parks. They've already gone through the learning curve so they can provide you with “do's” and “don'ts”.

Our Risk Management Department has developed a document that addresses all of the above in greater detail. For a copy, please call 1-800-265-4000 and ask for Barb Szychta or Cheryl Fitzsimons.