



SAFETY DIRECTOR BULLETIN



SKATE PARK BEST PRACTICES

Skateboard parks are a valued public amenity, offering recreation, physical activity, and community engagement for a wide range of users. As these facilities continue to evolve, many communities are also addressing mixed use by skateboarders and bicycle riders, including BMX users. While the activity itself involves inherent risk, sound skate park management can significantly reduce preventable injuries, improve facility condition, support defensible operations, and strengthen the park's overall risk profile. This bulletin outlines practical best practices for operating, inspecting, and maintaining public skateboard parks used by skateboarders and bicyclists.

For those who are considering building a new skate park, follow the instructions in the [New Jersey Municipal Excess Liability \(MEL\) Skateboards Coverage Bulletin](#). It provides MEL's skateboard facility insurance guidelines, park safety practices, and coverage requirements. MEL's reinsurers require the provisions in the Coverage Bulletin. It defines the design, approval, and construction process. Review it early in the new skate park process.

A well-managed skatepark begins with recognizing that the park owner can't eliminate all risk associated with riding. Falls, collisions, and user error are part of action sports. However, park owners can and should control the risks that arise from poor operating practices, delayed maintenance, unclear rules, inadequate inspection, and inconsistent documentation. The most effective risk control programs rest on a few core principles:

- Clear communication of permitted use,
- Regular and documented inspections,
- Prompt correction of hazardous conditions,
- Disciplined incident response, and
- Consistent recordkeeping.

These practices help a municipality demonstrate that it is managing the facility responsibly and maintaining it in a reasonably safe condition for its intended use.

One of the first and most important steps is assigning clear responsibility for the facility. Every skatepark should have an identified department or operational lead responsible for routine inspection, maintenance coordination, rule administration, hazard response, and documentation. Accountability should be defined clearly enough that there is no uncertainty about who is expected to act when conditions change or concerns are reported. Written operating procedures should address hours of operation, inspection schedules, closure authority, weather-related shutdowns, repair response expectations, and incident reporting. These operating procedures should be aligned with local policy, applicable local requirements, manufacturer guidance for installed components, and current ASTM guidance relevant to public-use skatepark facilities.

From a user-management standpoint, clear rules of use are one of the most visible and effective forms of risk control. Signage should be durable, prominent, and posted at the facility entrance, with supplemental signage inside the park where useful.

At a minimum, posted rules should identify hours of operation, specify permitted equipment, address safety gear expectations, prohibit glass, alcohol, drugs, and unauthorized obstacles, and state that the facility should not be used when wet, icy, flooded, or otherwise closed. Just as importantly, signage should state clearly whether bicycles, inline or roller skates, or kick scooters are permitted.

Mixed-use conflicts are common when BMX riders and skateboarders share the same facility, and ambiguity regarding permitted use often leads to user disputes, inconsistent enforcement, and unnecessary risk. Park owners should make an explicit policy decision on whether bicycles are fully permitted, restricted to certain times or areas, or not allowed.

Communicate protective equipment expectations consistently through signage, program materials, public information, and event documentation. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission recommends helmets and other protective gear for skateboard activity. That guidance strongly supports messaging that encourages helmet use, along with knee pads, elbow pads, and appropriate footwear. Where local rules or programming require helmets for certain users, such as minors or camp participants, those requirements should be reflected consistently in posted rules and staff practice.

Staff members should perform a routine visual inspection before opening or early in each operating day during the active season. This inspection should confirm that the riding surface is dry and free of standing water, mud, ice, snow, gravel, glass, leaves, branches, and unauthorized objects. Staff should also check for new cracks, spalling, sharp edges, loose coping, exposed metal, damaged fencing, missing signage, and vandalism that affects safety. If the park is intended to remain open after dark, staff should check lighting as part of normal operations. Any condition that creates an unreasonable hazard should prompt immediate corrective action, including closing the affected area where appropriate.

Establish clear criteria for temporary closure during weather and poor drainage conditions, and use physical barriers or unambiguous signage when closing all or part of the park. If drainage problems occur, whether from clogged drains, grading issues, or storm-related sediment buildup, they should be treated as a maintenance and risk control issue rather than a temporary inconvenience. Document, monitor, and escalate repeated ponding or delayed drying for correction.

A strong inspection program should extend beyond the daily visual check. Park owners should implement a structured inspection process that includes routine visual inspections, more detailed operational inspections weekly or biweekly, and periodic documented comprehensive inspections monthly or quarterly, depending on the facility's size, complexity, and use level.

These inspections should focus on those conditions most likely to create user harm in a wheeled-sports environment: cracks, settlement, spalling, seam separation, wheel-catch points, surface contamination, loose coping, sharp metal edges, deterioration of wood or composite elements where present, and defects affecting run-outs, decks, or transitions. Also inspect surrounding site features such as fencing, gates, seating, fountains, pathways, landscaping, and lighting, as they influence how the facility is used and whether unsafe conditions can be controlled effectively. A Skate Park Facility Hazard Identification Inspection is provided on [MSI Forms and Documents](#).

Staff training is important. Personnel responsible for inspections should be trained to recognize hazards. Park owners should use a straightforward hazard classification system so employees can distinguish between urgent conditions that require immediate closure, important conditions that require expedited repair, and minor deficiencies that can be monitored and scheduled.

Early intervention is usually the most effective and least costly form of risk control. Small defects in a skatepark can quickly become more serious, especially in high-impact areas or in facilities where bicycles are permitted. Park owners and operators should promptly remove debris and contaminants and repair cracks, chips, joint separation, coping movement, and drainage problems before conditions worsen.

Graffiti and vandalism should also be evaluated carefully. Some vandalism is cosmetic, but some create direct safety concerns by altering surface texture, adding unauthorized obstacles, damaging edges, cutting fences, or compromising lighting. Select repair methods carefully to avoid uneven patches, ridges, lips, or texture changes that create new wheel-catch points or unpredictable riding conditions. When specialized repair is needed, use contractors familiar with skatepark surfaces.

Mixed use by skateboarders and bicycle riders warrants additional attention. BMX use can increase wear at specific locations, including coping interfaces, landing zones, transitions, and edges subject to repeated contact from pegs, pedals, or higher-impact landings. If bicycles are permitted, municipalities should inspect these areas more frequently and respond early to signs of deterioration.

Mixed-use facilities also require attention to user flow. Bicycle riders often approach features differently, maintain different speeds, and require different stopping distances than skateboarders. If repeated collision patterns or persistent user conflict during peak periods are observed, consider operational separation, such as designated times.

Unsupervised operation does not relieve the need for routine presence, timely inspection, prompt maintenance response, and orderly enforcement of basic rules. Staff should visit regularly, especially after storms, weekends, school breaks, holidays, and other high-use periods. Enforcement should focus on issues most directly tied to safety, such as honoring closures, excluding prohibited motorized vehicles where applicable, and preventing the use of unauthorized obstacles.

A small number of important rules applied consistently will support safe operation better than an extensive policy framework that goes unenforced.

Incident response is another critical element. When an injury occurs, staff should first address emergency needs and request medical response where appropriate. If a park condition may have contributed to the event, that area should be secured pending evaluation. Use a standardized incident report form that captures the date, time, location, activity involved, equipment type, weather and surface conditions, observable facts regarding how the event occurred, witness information if available, staff response, and whether the area was inspected or closed afterward. Photographs should be taken. Reports should remain factual and objective, avoiding speculation or conclusions about causation or fault. Periodic review of incident reports can help identify trends.

Documentation underpins the entire risk control program. Retain organized records of inspections, work orders, repairs, photographs, incident reports, complaints, closures, and program or event approvals. Well-maintained records demonstrate not only that the park owner has adopted reasonable operational practices, but also that it follows them consistently.

From a risk management and claims perspective, showing that hazards were inspected, identified, prioritized, and addressed in a timely manner can be as important as the physical work itself. Good documentation also supports better long-term decision-making by helping leaders identify recurring maintenance needs, seasonal patterns, areas of heavy wear, and warranted capital improvements.

In summary, the most effective risk control practices for skateboard and bicycle parks depend on clear facility ownership, practical written procedures, visible and realistic rules, disciplined inspections, prompt closure and repair of hazardous conditions, informed maintenance practices, and consistent documentation. For parks that allow both skateboard and bicycle use, pay particular attention to user conflicts, congestion in landing zones and run-outs, and accelerated wear at high-impact locations. Skate park owners who manage facilities consistently will be better positioned to reduce preventable injuries, improve user experience, and support a more defensible public-entity risk profile.