

FITNESS CENTERS

Managing Hospitality Risk



WHAT'S AT RISK?

According to industry experts, 59 percent of U.S. business travelers use a hotel gym. But providing exercise facilities can also be a source of serious liability for hotels that do not control them properly. Focus on the selection of equipment, maintenance and security, to minimize the hazards.

NSU statistics confirm just how costly it can be to neglect this important area of a hotel or resort. Over the past decade, we have processed nearly 400 claims arising from recreational activity at hotels, at a cost of more than \$2.5 million. A single treadmill accident in 1998 cost \$495,000 to settle!

WHAT ARE YOUR LEGAL OBLIGATIONS?

Under common law, you are responsible to provide a safe, secure environment, free from foreseeable hazards. Exercise equipment must be in safe condition and there must be ample warnings and instructions on its safe use. When no supervision is provided, it must be clearly posted that guests use the facilities at their own risk.

Consideration should be given to a secure location. If possible, the fitness center should be in a visible area, frequented by hotel staff. Access doors or walls should have safety-glass windows so staff and other guests can see into the room. This reduces the potential for vandalism, horseplay, unauthorized use, criminal activity or injured patrons unable to notify hotel staff. The center should be enclosed with limited, controlled access points. Electronic key card access

is recommended. There should be scheduled rounds by staff, limited hours of access to the room and an inspection of the area prior to closing it for the night.

Select your equipment with guest safety in mind. Weight machines using stacked weights are generally safer than free weights that require a "spotter". Exercise bicycles, treadmills, stair-step machines and other equipment should be set-up, used and maintained per the manufacturer's recommendation. Prominently post instructions for use on the machine and inspect the fitness center daily to determine the condition and usability of all equipment. Defective equipment should be tagged and taken out of use immediately.

HOW CAN YOU BETTER PROTECT YOUR ORGANIZATION?

For some suggestions designed to assist you in developing sound policies and procedures for your organization, please turn this document over and review the attached checklist.

For more information about this and other hospitality risk management topics, please contact:

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Checklist: Fitness Centers

RULES

- Post guest rules to the fitness center at the registration desk and at the front of the center.
- You should post a disclaimer that neither the hotel nor fitness center are responsible for personal items stored or left in workout or locker areas. Ask guests to secure their valuables in safety deposit boxes only, not in their lockers.
- Instruct guests that the exercise equipment was designed for reasonable adult use only. Improper use can result in serious harm.
- Children under 16 or under four feet tall should only be allowed to use fitness centers under adult supervision.
- Guests should be asked to limit themselves to thirty (30) minutes on cardiovascular machines.
- Only water should be allowed in workout areas. No food or other drink should be permitted.
- Ask guests to wipe off equipment after use; provide towels and disinfectant spray for this purpose.
- Instruct guests to lower and raise all equipment carefully; forbid the dropping of equipment. All weights, dumbbells, bars and plates should be replaced to their original spot when guests are finished.
- Hotels should purchase commercial-grade exercise equipment. Commercial-grade equipment is designed to be more durable, needs fewer adjustments, and has fewer moving parts, which helps to decrease user injuries.
- Equipment should be laid out so that guests can exercise without endangering one another. Most manufacturers offer free facility planning and will offer suggestions on spacing, equipment needs, and industry trends.

- Moving equipment— especially treadmills—should have full-length handrails. Treadmills should have more than one stop button: one on the display and one towards the back of the handrails. Buttons should be color coded (green for go, red for stop) to help non-English speakers.
- All exercise equipment should have a clear placard of instructions, be easy to set, and the exercises should be fairly basic and intuitive.

SAUNAS

- Sauna temperature should be maintained at 170 to 180 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Recommended use is a maximum of ten (10) minutes; Saunas are not recommended for individuals with cardiovascular or respiratory disorders.
- There should be no food or drink allowed inside saunas. Showers are required before entering.

WHIRLPOOLS

- Whirlpool temperature should be maintained at 102 to 105 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Recommended use is a maximum of ten (10) minutes; whirlpools are not recommended for individuals with cardiovascular or respiratory disorders.
- There should be no food or drink allowed inside; showers should be required before entering.

STEAM ROOMS

- Steam room temperature is 100 to 110 degrees Fahrenheit; recommended use is a maximum of ten (10) minutes.
- Steam rooms are not recommended for individuals with cardiovascular or respiratory disorders.
- No food or drink allowed inside; showers are required before entering.