

WINTER WEATHER RISK REDUCTION

Park districts must be mindful of the risks their communities face during the winter months, including snow removal, community events, outdoor activities, and building maintenance. Identifying the risks associated with the winter weather is the first step in risk reduction. Do you have snow removal operations? Is your community more susceptible to ice storms? [Do you have outdoor park areas for recreational activities such as sledding, ice skating, or winter hiking?](#) What annual maintenance should be done to reduce potential building damage throughout the winter? Here are some ways to help mitigate these risks.

SNOW REMOVAL OPERATIONS

The first step in reducing risk with snow removal is to prepare the drivers and the plow trucks. Drivers should be trained in snow removal, route challenges, truck operation, and emergency procedures. Before the first snowfall, the plow trucks should be thoroughly prepped with a full inspection of fluid systems, brakes, wipers, lights, batteries, wheels, and tires. Complete pre-trip inspections before every snow removal operation. All plow trucks should be equipped with shovels,

basic tool kits, flashlights, and fleet safety road flares to alert other drivers of an accident or vehicle breakdown.

SIDEWALKS AND PATHWAYS

Park districts are responsible for removing snow and maintaining accessible routes of travel, including sidewalks, to comply with the [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#). Ensuring safe travel paths in and out of public buildings should be a priority. Other ways to help increase safety include:

- Have clearly marked paths of travel
- Keep steps clear and well-lit, and maintain handrails
- Install walk-off mats at entrances to public buildings to reduce slip and fall hazards from residual snow on footwear
- Utilize wet floor signage
- Have an employee responsible for monitoring the safety of entrances

OUTDOOR RECREATION SAFETY

Winter recreation activities include sledding, tubing, ice skating, and ice fishing. Park districts with designated sledding hills

in their community should have adequate insurance coverage. A winter activity area requires an evaluation of sledding hills, which includes considering the fencing, boundaries, lighting, and regular inspections.

These hills should be inspected in the months leading up to the winter season, identifying any new dangers, including downed trees, limbs, and holes.

Park districts without designated sledding hills should be aware of any public property residents are using as sledding hills. These sledding areas should be identified and inspected as if they were designated. The risk still exists if residents use public property for these activities and get injured.

Closely monitor bodies of water with potential use for ice skating and ice fishing. Ways to help mitigate risk include having water rescue procedures and equipment and guidelines for monitoring the ice conditions. [Use signage to advise of unsafe conditions or when activities are prohibited.](#)



Photo courtesy of Oswegoland Park District

IN THIS ISSUE:

Winter Weather Risk Reduction	pg 1
The Risks Associated With Vacant Buildings	pg 2-3
Cyber Attacks Increasing on Mobile Devices	pg 4
Employee Training Q&A	pg 5
Member Spotlight/ Submit Your IPARKS Grant Applications/ January Social Reminder	pg 6
Understanding Respiratory Illnesses	pg 7
Holiday Safety	pg 8

OUR PROMISE

Your IPARKS membership makes it easy for you to provide safe places to play, relax, and enjoy. By making safety a priority, we empower you to improve upon best practices and work in collaboration with your fellow members to protect your district, assets, and those you serve.

LESSONS LEARNED: THE RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH VACANT BUILDINGS

By: Marco Guardi, Vice President, Risk Services, Sedgwick
Jon Paulsen, Senior Vice President, Specialty Operations, Sedgwick



A vacant building could be the scene of a kid's grand adventure or the setting straight out of a scary movie. Either way, when these structures sit empty for an extended period of time — whether they're for sale or have been in escrow — some lessons get learned the hard way, with unanticipated risks wreaking havoc on the forgotten properties.

IDENTIFYING THE RISKS

There are myriad reasons why facilities might go unused. When these buildings are no longer actively being used, utilities and alarm systems are frequently disconnected. Fire extinguishers and other protective equipment are often removed. Maintenance services are seldom or no longer provided. If a sprinkler head is tripped or a pipe bursts, there is no one there to address or report the situation, and extensive water damage can result. All of these scenarios carry added property and liability risks.

Kids might view a vacant building as a fortress for play, but unrestricted access for young trespassers could lead to injuries from an accidental fall, broken glass, or faulty maintenance. The result can be sizeable liability claims and legal expenses. And bare walls might make the perfect canvas for creativity; unfortunately, they can also lead to contents being destroyed or a building being defaced.



With no personnel onsite, outsiders can seek shelter in these vacant structures. Windows and doors are frequently shattered to gain access. Extensive trash and debris are left behind. Smoking and drug use are common. Fires started for added warmth can quickly become uncontrolled and with no extinguishers or alarm systems activated, can cause extensive damage. The clean-up costs in these situations can be significant. And if officials are called to inspect a building in which a group of people have set up camp, serious altercations and physical threats can create a very real safety issue and workers' compensation exposure.

Because of its value, copper is in high demand; some thieves will break into vacant buildings and target the electrical boxes to swipe copper wiring and components. The damage created in accessing the building and tearing through the electrical panels and boxes to reach the copper far exceeds the value of the contents taken. Again, the entity is left with a sizeable bill.

MITIGATING THE RISKS

Luckily, there are steps that entities and other commercial property owners can take when faced with building vacancies. First, the property owner should keep utilities connected and operational. This will help ensure fire suppression systems or fire alarm systems are activated, and authorities are notified; alarm systems can also signal if a sprinkler head breaks or a pipe bursts, so personnel can respond and control water damage. Fencing, locks, and video surveillance systems can also dissuade unauthorized people from entering the property. Periodic inspections of the premises can help detect potential hazards or risks before they become full-blown liabilities. Hiring security officers to patrol and monitor the premises can also stave off unwelcome visitors.

Risk controls do come with a price tag. But they also enable property owners to make calculated analyses versus having to deal with the costly aftermath of an unrecognized exposure. This is one more way risk professionals bring value to the equation and help elevate the need for asset protection strategies.

For more information on how IPARKS can help, please contact your IPARKS Risk Control Consultant, Jason Johnston
email jjohnston@iparks.org



CYBER ATTACKS

INCREASING ON MOBILE DEVICES

BY IPARKS RISK SERVICES

There are 16+ billion mobile devices in use worldwide, and threat actors are shifting focus and tactics to put their attacks into the victim's hands.

- 82% of organizations allow BYOD (bring your own devices)
- The average smartphone has 80 apps installed, with 5-11 being work-related
- 85% of the apps on the devices are personal apps that all have risk exposure
- 71% of employees leverage smartphones for work tasks
- 60% of employees use their smartphones for work-related communication
- 48% of employees use their smartphones for accessing work-related information

Employees are using their mobile devices for work, and there's a shift occurring towards attacking those mobile devices.

- 83% of phishing sites are being designed to specifically target mobile devices
- Mobile malware instances have increased 13% in the last year
- 80% of all malwares appear to be riskware and trojans deployed as "sideloaded apps," i.e. apps installed using a method other than the official app store or official site

Most entities have limited ability to secure employee's personal devices, so it's necessary to leverage the employees themselves as part of a security strategy through security awareness training to elevate their continual sense of vigilance when interacting with email and the web on a mobile device.

One of the methods scammers use to access private information and steal money is called "smishing." They may pose as a company or person and send texts to recipients asking them to reply with passwords, credit card numbers, or other personal data.

Smishing texts are usually written in a way that sounds urgent and ask the recipient for a response or favor. They may also use vague language referring to a mystery "client" or "customer" without any identifying details. A smishing text might look like:

"Hi [your first name], I'm in a conference call right now and can't talk on the phone. I need you to buy a \$500 Amazon gift card for a client. Let me know what the activation code is ASAP. Thanks, [executive's name]."

When recipients don't reply to the initial message, scammers may follow up with one or more additional texts. Do not reply to any suspicious messages, even if you have received them multiple times.

The following are some useful digital safety tips to know:

- Be aware and on alert. Knowing how attacks work can help you avoid being scammed
- Verify, verify, verify! Just because an email, voicemail, or text has seemingly come from a name you know, it doesn't mean the message is actually from that person. Verify the request through a different method than you received it
- Never make any transactions, including transactions of funds, without first verifying the identity and intent of the requestor
- Consider the source. Think about whether it is likely that this person would contact you with a business-related request via text or messaging app
- Do not answer calls or text messages from unknown phone numbers when you suspect it is a scam call. Caller IDs can be spoofed
- Do not respond to automated calls, including those asking you to press a button for the prompts. Such calls may be recorded to manipulate your voice and navigate any voice-based accounts
- Do not give out sensitive information to anyone, including passwords, codes, etc.

Don't fall for it! If you suspect you've received a phishing/smishing request, do not click on any links, or take any actions indicated in the message.



EMPLOYEE TRAINING Q&A

BY NATACHA MCCLAIN, DESIGNATED LITIGATION MANAGER

In the United States, nearly 20 million people are employed by entities, including park districts. Although park districts are subject to different laws than private employers, many legal obligations and benefits remain the same. Here are some answers to training-related questions, as well as considerations emphasizing the importance of formal park district employee training beyond what informal on-the-job training can offer.

WHY SHOULD PARK DISTRICTS TRAIN EMPLOYEES?

Properly trained employees lower your park district's risks of exposure. Failing to train employees can potentially create safety issues and increase the park district's litigation risk. Even employees who have been working in the same or similar positions for many years may need to learn about updates or simply have a refresher on how to accurately perform their duties. Federal, state, and other laws may require regular training depending on the subject matter and position of the employee.

HOW MUCH IS EMPLOYEE TRAINING GOING TO COST MY PARK DISTRICT?

Many options exist to fit your park district's budget and will vary depending on the type of method. Online videos and eLearning platforms range in pricing. Instructors can be hired to conduct in-person training sessions. Alternatively, park districts can train their own employees to serve as instructors for other employees.

WHY DO PARK DISTRICT EMPLOYEES NEED FORMAL TRAINING? ISN'T ON-THE-JOB TRAINING ENOUGH?

Formal training can be more easily documented, providing evidence that the park district offered education opportunities. Moreover, employees should be informed and trained on policies and procedures that standardize methods for performing their job duties. Formal training offers consistency in that each employee is being taught the same information. This consistency can be applied to educating employees on the park district's values, visions, and missions.



IS SEXUAL HARASSMENT PREVENTION TRAINING REQUIRED FOR ALL EMPLOYEES?

Illinois requires annual sexual harassment training for all employees and should include part-time and temporary/short-term employees under the age of 18.

Educating your workforce on harassment policies is the best step an employer can take to prevent sexual harassment from occurring and contribute to a positive work culture. Moreover, employers who enforce sexual harassment training minimize exposure to punitive damage claims in harassment lawsuits.

MY EMPLOYEE MISSED A TRAINING SESSION. WHAT SHOULD I DO?

If possible, consider offering a make-up training session for those who missed the original training session. Alternatively, consider whether the training can be recorded and viewed by the employee when they return to work during their normal working hours. If training is mandated by law, then the employee must complete it.

CAN I ASK MY EMPLOYEES TO TRAIN OUTSIDE OF WORKING HOURS?

- Asking employees to train outside of working hours can be problematic.
- Asking an employee to complete training at home could trigger wage and hour obligations on the part of the park district.
- Conducting self-training may not meet the requirements of the training that is needed by the park district.
- At-home training creates challenges in confirming whether the employee completed AND learned from the training.

These materials have been prepared for general informational purposes only and are not legal advice.

SPOTLIGHT ON OSWEGOLAND PARK DISTRICT

For 20,000 households, the Oswegoland Park District sets a high standard for community engagement, with its dedication to the stewardship of their natural areas, parks, and shared facilities. The park district not only maintains these physical assets; it also provides a year-round suite of educational classes from early childhood to adult and family enrichment, outdoor activities, summer camps, sports and fitness activities, and events for all age groups.

Established in 1950 as a special district, Oswegoland Park District originally covered approximately 38-square-miles including the Village of Oswego, Boulder Hill, parts of Montgomery, Aurora, and Plainfield, as well as the surrounding countryside of Oswego Township and a small portion of Will County.

Today, this beautiful park district serves not only its residents. Oswegoland Park District also takes great pride in preserving over 600 acres of natural conservation lands including prairies, wetlands, woodlands, and community gardens. To maintain these areas and to encourage community involvement, Oswegoland Park District offers several volunteer opportunities to its residents, who generously give their time to preserve these natural areas.

In addition to the numerous facilities Oswegoland Park District provides, including but not limited to 57 parks, 38 playgrounds, 20 miles of biking and hiking trails, and 8 sled hills, it also provides the district it serves with numerous programs in a dedicated effort to create a healthy and inclusive community, while helping families make memories that will last a lifetime.



Oswegoland Park District has also established the Oswegoland Park Foundation, a community-focused fundraising organization dedicated to assisting the park district. With the generous support of the community, the Park Foundation has donated a total of \$75,000 to the Park District's Financial Assistance Program since 2020.

The progress of Oswegoland Park District has demonstrated how much a community can accomplish by working together. IPARKS is proud to have Oswegoland Park District as a member! To learn more, visit www.oswegolandparkdistrict.org.

SUBMIT YOUR IPARKS GRANT REIMBURSEMENT APPLICATIONS

As a reminder, members are eligible to have qualified expenses reimbursed starting at **\$500** for the IPARKS **Power Grant**, **\$350** for the **Swing Modification Program**, and **\$500** for **Aquatics Training**. IPARKS is pleased to offer these programs and wants to ensure its members are taking full advantage of the opportunities available to them. Visit www.iparks.org for more information.



JANUARY SOCIAL REMINDER

As in recent years, IPARKS will be hosting its Member Social at the January 2025 IAPD/IPRA Soaring to New Heights Conference. We hope our members will join us in socializing and learning more about each other's agencies. The Member Social is Thursday, January 23 at 5:30-7:30 pm, in the East Tower at the Hyatt Regency Chicago, Michigan 1 room.



UNDERSTANDING RESPIRATORY ILLNESSES

CAUSES, SYMPTOMS, AND PREVENTION

BY IPARKS RISK SERVICES

Respiratory illnesses affect the lungs and other parts of the respiratory system, causing many symptoms and complications. Conditions can range from mild colds to severe diseases like pneumonia. Understanding the basics can help individuals effectively prevent, manage, and treat these conditions. Below are some frequently asked questions to provide clarity on common respiratory diseases.

WHAT ARE RESPIRATORY ILLNESSES?

These refer to infections or diseases that affect the respiratory system, such as colds, flu, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), COVID-19, and pneumonia.

HOW ARE THESE ILLNESSES SPREAD?

They are spread by breathing in droplets from an infected person when they cough or sneeze or by touching a contaminated surface or object and then touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.

WHAT ARE THE RISK FACTORS FOR CONTRACTING A RESPIRATORY ILLNESS?

Anyone can contract common respiratory illnesses, but according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), some people have risk factors that increase their chances of getting sick and having a severe illness. These include:

- Older adults
- Young children
- People with weakened immune systems
- People with diabetes
- Pregnant women (or recently pregnant women)

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF RESPIRATORY ILLNESSES?

Symptoms can include:

- Fever
- Chills
- Fatigue or weakness
- Cough
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Sore throat
- Vomiting
- New loss of taste or smell
- Headache, muscle, or body aches
- Diarrhea

WHAT CAN I DO TO PROTECT MYSELF FROM RESPIRATORY ILLNESSES?

There are several things you can do to protect yourself and others:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick
- Wash your hands frequently
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth - germs spread this way
- Maintain a healthy lifestyle - balanced diet, regular exercise, and staying hydrated
- Stay home when you're sick - at least 24 hours after your fever is gone
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and objects that may be contaminated
- Consider getting vaccines for respiratory illnesses

WHAT ARE THE EMERGENCY WARNING SIGNS?

According to the CDC, people experiencing any of these warning signs should obtain medical care right away:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Persistent pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Persistent dizziness, confusion
- Seizures
- Not urinating
- Severe muscle pain
- Severe weakness or unsteadiness
- Fever or cough that improves but then returns or worsens
- Worsening of chronic medical conditions





IPARKS Service Center
315 S. Kalamazoo Mall
Kalamazoo, MI 49007

If our mailing records need to be updated, please contact the IPARKS Service Center at (800) 748-0554, ext. 3136.
IPARKS newsletters are available for viewing and printing at www.iparks.org.

HOLIDAY SAFETY

IPARKS wishes all of you a joyful holiday season. To keep the holidays festive and safe, follow these guidelines for the workplace and home.

DECORATE WITH CARE

Decorating your office can be a fun way to help everyone enjoy the spirit of the season. Here are some safety precautions to consider:

- Check all electrical decorations for broken sockets and damaged wiring.
- Never tack or staple electrical cords to the wall or floor; this could damage the cord and create a fire hazard.
- Use only flame-resistant tinsel, wreaths, and other trimmings. Consider an artificial tree, but if you have a real tree, remember to water it daily. Dry trees catch on fire more easily.
- Candles cause approximately 10,000 fires per year. They are not recommended at the workplace. Use battery-operated flameless candles instead.
- Avoid placing trees, gifts, or freestanding decorations in high-traffic areas where they can become a tripping hazard.



BE SAFE ON THE LADDER

Every year, over 100,000 people are injured because they fall from a ladder. While most of the injuries are cuts, bruises, and fractures, more than 300 fatalities occur every year. Be sure you follow these simple rules when using a ladder during the holidays:

- Always check the ladder for defects and make sure the steps are free of slippery material. Don't use it if the anti-slip safety feet are missing.
- Ensure the ladder is fully open and all feet are placed on a level surface.
- Keep your body near the center of the steps.
- Don't use the top step/rung of the ladder.
- Always face the ladder and hold on when climbing or descending.

DRINK WISELY

Have plenty of non-alcoholic drinks available and consider serving alcohol at specified times, like before dinner and up to an hour after dinner. Stop serving alcoholic beverages about an hour before the party ends. Provide plenty of food so that guests do not drink on an empty stomach.

If needed, arrange alternate transportation or ensure guests leave with a sober driver.



IPARKS is the risk management affinity partner of Illinois Association of Park Districts (IAPD), working to provide affordable, specialized coverage programs and valuable loss control resources for park districts, recreation and conservation districts, river conservancy districts, forest preserves and special recreation agencies.