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Column Editor

## summary

Adhering to specific guidelines and standards for risk management provides consistency with the facility's operating procedures and decreases the opportunity for unsupervised training, thus decreasing chance of litigation.

Over the years, fitness centers and workout rooms have been a popular addition to many university and high school campuses. Along with this opportunity comes increased professional responsibility for the facility and how to properly manage it. Daily operating procedures, general policies, and management styles can vary, but all should conform to the professional standards within the industry.

A new challenge that many daily facility managers are facing is the requested use of such a facility during nonoperational and unsupervised hours. Faculty, staff, and students believe they have

# Who Gets a Key—Is Supervision in the Weight Room Really Necessary?

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the right to use a facility on their time regardless of the supervision or legal requirement of the institution and the profession. School administrators and facility managers must assess the rights of these individuals and at the same time maintain reasonable and prudent procedures for the safe use of the facility.

Professional resources within strength and conditioning and the health and fitness industry outline specific standards and guidelines for risk management and prudent operating procedures (1, 2). The main objective of this resource information is to provide reasonable procedures that ensure the safety of the participant through credentialed instruction and supervision within a safe environment. Following these operating procedures greatly reduces the exposure to litigation against the facility and its personnel, but it is not eliminated. Although many lay users have “What’s the harm?” or “What’s the big deal?” attitudes when requesting this type of facility use, there is more at stake than they realize. The challenge here is to guide the general population’s understanding of the industry’s standards and guidelines that the institution, administration, and supervising professional are obligated to uphold.

Many of our fellow professionals can attest to a minor injury or incident that costs not only the participant personal harm, but also the facility large sums of money and the professionals their careers.

The following steps provide some reasonable guidance as a review process for access challenges in these types of cases. These steps may be limited in ensuring a fail-safe process and should be reviewed closely by the independent institutions.

1. Review coverage with your risk-management officer or insurance carrier. What would he or she like to see in place to reduce the risk of litigation?
2. Draft guidelines according to the acceptable professional standards and those of the school administration and risk management.
3. Implement the use of informed-consent, assumption-of-risk, self-health—appraisal documents to be signed by the individual user for the protection of the user, the institution, and the facility professional.
4. Obtain a written contract agreement with administration and potential user.

5. Distribute a policy statement recommending that no one should workout alone.
6. Require certification for CPR and first aid for all potential supervisors.
7. Orient all potential users of the facility to the proper use of the equipment, facility policies and procedures, and emergency procedures.
8. Post appropriate signs that clearly display facility rules and regulations and hours of operation.
9. Urge all potential users to use the facility during normal operational and supervised hours.
10. Review annually all policies and procedures and revise all consent forms and health questionnaires as necessary.

If it is the choice of the institution to provide privileges to use the workout fa-

cility without supervision, a full review of risks, expectations, and procedures should be completed for the protection of all involved. An unacceptable approach is, "here's a key and be careful." Reasonable steps should be outlined and agreed upon by the school's risk-management department or insurance carrier, the school administration, and the supervising facility professional. The potential user should be prepared to assume a reasonable and "real" amount of risk and personal responsibility. Although the institution and professionals still have the duty to protect the user, they have full rights to protect themselves as well.

We do not agree with unsupervised use of any weight room or fitness facility on institutional property by any person, in-

cluding the administration or ourselves. At all times, participation should take place under qualified supervision and should be done within the normal hours of operation. ♦

## References

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2. Peterson, J.A., and S.J. Tharrett. *ACSM's Health and Facility Standards and Guidelines* (2nd ed.). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1992.

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