

September 10, 2021

## Preparing for Winter: Parks and Trails

Picture it - you are walking with your family or friends, wearing your warm jacket and maybe a scarf, holding a warm mug of coffee or tea, and hearing the crunch of the trail underfoot. Watching the golden yellow, burnt red and mocha brown trees sway and lose their leaves all around and above you. Sweet and crisp smells hitting your cool face as you laugh and talk about your upcoming holiday plans. The last thing you are thinking about is any dangers that may be around you. This is your reminder before the inevitable snow falls and things become harder to get your parks, skate parks, and trails prepped.

### Parks and Skate Parks

Parks and playgrounds are often busy year-round and require a high level of maintenance and attention as they are where children play, teens gather, and parents socialize. They are seen by many as a community beacon.

Our communities expect these places are safe and kept up. It is important that these places and structures have policies in place to uphold those expectations.

Skate parks are local attractions that are designed for unstructured and unsupervised fun. They are a place many adventurous and creative adrenalin-focused youth tend to find solace from their day-to-day pressures and attempt to do some innovative and risky stunts. Naturally, these parks are hazardous and many of the attendees have injuries and scares. These parks are usually made up of concrete, steel, and sharp corners. Most of these parks have unwritten etiquette for what is expected from one another and there is often a sense of community.

Ensuring that parks and skate parks are ready for winter can be a difficult task and difficult on budgets if there is need for repairs or further follow-up. The main thing to remember is that most of these locations will soon host snow and ice, bringing about slippery sidewalks, indoor and outdoor rinks, toboggan hills, and winter fun. The best thing to do is to look at these areas and ensure they will be safe.

### Trails

Alberta is a vast and beautiful province. Its trails are a wonderful way to stay in shape and discover our diverse landscapes. Users can be important role models for safety and protecting our limited natural resources. While municipalities plan and dedicate both human and economic resources to safe design of trails in their communities, volunteers can play a key role by contributing to the human resource aspect of trail monitoring and patrol.

### Inspections and checklists

A great habit to form is to have a daily, weekly, and annual checklist or inspection completed on these locations. Having an employee or even a volunteer (parks program, local community hall, or walking group) attend and look for any risks can help you prevent incidents. The important thing is to walk through these areas and note any issues you see. If possible, consider recording the walk-through on a phone or camera to capture what the parks and trails look like in the moment. It is valuable to do your inspections prior to winter as snow hides things you would normally see during warmer months and the cold can make you forget the little things you would otherwise notice.

This time of year, take extra notice of where things will be. If you have a hill near a park, there is a likelihood that children will be using it to toboggan – is that hill safe? Are there any items protruding out of the hill that will

need to be addressed? If there will be a rink set up, are there issues where the ground has become uneven? Is there something that may affect the ice or the safety of getting on and off it? Consider if this could be visible with snow, and if not, you may consider flagging the area or even closing the trail over the winter months.

If there were to be a claim that resulted, we could use these documents to aid in defence of our membership. These documents can make a big difference in most cases. They can show a habit or a policy that your organization has in place and the care that is taken to mitigate a loss from occurring.

It is very important that if you notice any safety hazard or concern, you create a plan to protect your residence, find a solution to the issue, and implement it right away. Even if it may mean you are closing the park or removing the danger until it can be addressed.

Remember that doing inspections is about ensuring an area is safe, but this time of year it's also about determining if it will be safe during the next season. Parks boast green space, sidewalks, and playground equipment. All these areas can result in their own types of liabilities. We encourage you to read the Doug Wyesman documents on [ClearRisk](#) to aid you in preparing your staff and any polices that you may want to enforce.

## Signs

Many of our members and non-members have moved to adding warnings or guidelines for parks and trails to their websites. They also add in maintenance schedules and notices of any closures to advise people in advance. You can have one large sign directing people to a website. Another great way to ensure your office is being advised of any issues noticed by patrons is to add a sign or a link on your website to report any dangers or hazards.

Too many signs or signs that are overly complicated can create confusion. It is important to remember:

- ◆ Keep it as simple as possible.
- ◆ Pictures are often easiest to understand
- ◆ Locate it where it will be seen

For more information, please contact:

**Helene Klassen**

*Risk Advisor*

780.955.4078

[helene@RMAinsurance.com](mailto:helene@RMAinsurance.com)

**Lacey Barnhard**

*Risk Advisor*

587.671.0108

[lacey@RMAinsurance.com](mailto:lacey@RMAinsurance.com)