



After School Dangers

by Tom Merrill



Events, planned and unplanned can happen at a school, after the last bell of the school day rings or even on weekends. Unplanned activities usually involve individuals and groups of individuals using the school grounds and sports equipment without permission. Unfortunately, this can lead to physical damage to the facilities or even an unsafe situation for school students when school is back in session.

In winter months, schools with hills can occasionally become snow sledding venues. This sometimes entails taking down a school fence or cutting a lock on a gate to allow vehicles to drive closer to where the sledding is actually taking place. Ruts from vehicle travel can damage the playground surface in addition to the destruction to school fences and gates. Posted “no trespassing” signs can facilitate later police enforcement and may serve to lower school district liability should an injury occur.

When good weather arrives, other unsafe situations can arise. One school sustained damage caused by neighborhood teenagers who were caught skateboarding on the roof. Another school found children riding bicycles on an easily accessed roof. Unbelievably, an old disposed of couch was found on the roof of another school, having been placed there to facilitate watching a city fireworks display.

An accident that took place last spring at a Utah school brings up another unsafe situation that could have easily had a tragic ending. Adults had been using an elementary school soccer field on weekends. The soccer goal “spacing” was not to their liking, so the participants removed the ground anchors on one set of soccer goals and re-positioned it for adult play. After they were finished, the goal was returned to its original location, but the ground anchors were not re-attached. The next week at the school, a high wind blew the unanchored soccer goal over and injured a child at recess.

Group activities taking place on a regular basis at a school should be formalized by a written contract, clearly denoting responsible parties and detailing liability for potential damage. Exterior school facilities should also be inspected every morning at the beginning of the school day and after weekends for damage or equipment modifications that could later result in student injuries.

