Risk management is an essential part of good business practice. Where skate ramps are used, it is important to find the right balance between encouraging young people to undertake a high risk recreational pursuit of their choosing and meeting expectations about their safety.

Young people are quite vulnerable because they take more risk. Higher risk then leads to a more onerous duty of care to ensure their safety.

Skate ramp users must be supervised at all times while skating; encouraged to practice skateboarding safely; and use protective equipment at all times.

**What skill levels will be catered for?**

Skaters of all ages and skill levels must be considered.Commonly, skill levels are categorised as either beginner, intermediate or advanced (extreme) and age groups should also be considered with strict emphasis on those younger or older than the preferred age range.

**Choosing equipment and design**

When choosing the equipment and design of the skate ramp, keep in mind your target age groups and the different skill levels of users. If needed, design and set up a range of different areas for skaters with different levels of ability. Segregation means less embarrassment, fewer injuries, and greater satisfaction.

**Identifying different skill areas:**

Where multiple ramps are used, consider colour coding ramps to identify the different degree of difficulty. One possibility may be to use similar methodology to that used in snow skiing, i.e. green, blue or black, indicating easy, medium or hard.

**Types of Ramp**

The main types used by skateboarders, BMX and aggressive in-line skaters are:

**Vertical ramp**

A vertical ramp caters primarily for advanced skateboarders. Users tend to be in the older age groups, i.e. 17-plus.

**Composite ramp**

Composite ramps are an amalgamation of vertical and mini ramps, with a number of optional design variations. They are generally wider than conventional ramps.

**Street-style ramp**

Obstacles or small ramps are used to create the challenge of street-style skating. These can be transportable and relatively inexpensive.
Factors for consideration

Layout, placement and construction materials

In accordance with regulations your ramp/s must meet the correct specifications in design, placement, surfaces, height, gradient and testing. What are you catering for - skateboards, bikes or blades?

- Design the ramp in accordance with the intended users.
- Position in a north-south direction of motion to reduce sun glare in the mornings and afternoons.
- Leave a safe distance around the ramp. Skateboards tend to go flying and may travel some distance at speed. Pedestrians, roads and spectators should all be well out of range of stray skateboards.
- Consider the effectiveness of drainage during and after heavy rain. Water needs to drain from surfaces, steps and platforms without pooling. This may help minimise corrosion and slip accidents.
- Immediate surrounds must also have sufficient drainage to prevent boggy conditions. Dirt, sand or mulch on skating surfaces may also create a dangerous skating surface and damage in-line skates and boards.
- Fencing and handrails are recommended. 1.5m in height with weld-mesh surrounds to catch stray skateboards. In-ground facilities may also need fencing to prevent people falling in accidentally. Fencing separation between skate ramps and roads is also advisable.
- Vertical ramps with landing platforms must have guard rails on each side, to prevent users falling over or through.
- Vehicle access should be avoided to prevent skating under each side, to prevent users falling over or through.

Surface materials used for large ramps may be concrete, plywood, mild steel, aluminium or laminates. Surface materials will usually give some indication of the material used in the sub-frame. Usually timber, steel or aluminium.

Protective equipment

Before riders use their skate equipment they should empty pockets of all hard and sharp objects and put on protective gear.

Essential protective equipment includes:

- A properly fitting helmet with chin and side straps that form a ‘V’ shape around each ear.
- Make sure it’s an approved helmet with a sticker showing the Australian Standard AS 2063 (AS/NZS 2063).
- Wrist guards.
- Knee and elbow pads.
- Shoes.

Signage

- Use pictograms or simple language.
- Use white lettering on black backgrounds to discourage graffiti.
- Indicate hours of use.
- Indicate what is unacceptable – glass containers, pets, food/liquid, etc. Wording is important and should always be positive with recommendations and suggestions.
- Always include emergency phone numbers.
- Signs are regularly inspected and maintained.

Expertise/age of the rider

The facility must be graded for rider proficiency and age. Riders too young or too old who are most susceptible to injury should be excluded from use. That means all children under 5 should be excluded (they have not yet developed the necessary skills to ride safely). Children 6 – 10 should be very closely supervised. Adults over age 40 should also be excluded unless they are regulars in the sport.

Supervision

- This is essential to determine the expertise of the rider/s. Supervision will identify dangerous use. Always screen the area before allowing use, inspecting surfaces for rocks and other debris.
- Do not allow skylarking or speed and tricks beyond the capability of the riders.
- Never allow riders to use headphones.
- Know what to do in an emergency and be adequately trained in First Aid.
- All supervisors must go through Child Protection checks.
- Supervision times to be posted. No facility use should be allowed outside of posted supervision times.

Maintenance, Condition, Corrosion

Regular scheduled maintenance checks are essential to the safety of users. Well-maintained, well-used facilities, free of vandalism, litter, and graffiti, help to break down negative stereotypes and encourage permission by parents to use the facilities.

Make sure that maintenance needs are recorded and scheduled for repair, with urgent needs acted upon quickly. Where urgent repairs are not possible, close the facility immediately until the work is completed and it is safe to re-open.

- Keep a log book of servicing and repair work.
- Allow for easy recording of suspected problems.
- Conduct regular condition assessments, particularly for corrosion and damaged or rough surfaces.
- Only use experienced, qualified and insured tradesmen for construction and repair work.

Weather extremes and shade

- Never allow skateboarding in wet weather.
- Children will stay for hours on end – provide sufficient shade and a water fountain.

Night Use - Lighting and Noise

- Do not permit skateboarding in darkness or at night without sufficient lighting.
- If used at dawn, dusk or night, make sure lighting is operational and effective.
- Neighbours should be considered for noise when the equipment is used outside normal school and business hours.
First Aid

- Supervisors must be First Aid qualified.
- First Aid kits to be provided on site – fully equipped and refreshed annually.

Legal review

Given the high level of risk, an organisation should not construct and operate a skateboarding facility without the prior review and approval of legal counsel.

- Have parents sign consent forms for individuals who are part of regular user groups?
- Have Council regulations and Australian Standards been met?
- A safety manual or risk management plan has been developed and distributed to all relevant stakeholders.
- Education programs have been designed and implemented for existing and new user groups.

Check the Equal Opportunity Act in your State or Territory. In Victoria, discrimination against another person on the basis of impairment, physical features or pregnancy is permitted only if the discrimination is reasonably necessary to protect the health or safety of any person, including the person discriminated against, or of the public generally.

Check with other organisations that use skate ramps to find out what they are doing to manage the risks. Adopt procedures and precautions that you consider helpful.

Public Liability Insurance

Check that your insurance will cover Public Liability claims arising from the use of skate ramps. You may find that high deductibles are applied for hazardous activities that have not had Ansvar’s written approval.

Related Legislation

Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004
AS/NZS 4422: 1996 Playground Surfacing - Specification’s requirements & test method
AS/NZS 4486: 1997 Playground Equipment - Development, installation inspection maintenance & operation
AS 4685-1 - 2004 General Safety Requirements & test methods
AS 4685-2 - 2004 Particular safety requirements & test methods for swings
AS 4685-3 - 2004 Particular safety requirements & test methods for slides
AS 4685-4 - 2004 Particular safety requirements & test methods for runways
AS 4685-5 - 2004 Particular safety requirements & test methods for carousels
AS 4685-6 - 2004 Particular safety requirements & test methods for rocking equipment