

## **Risk Assessments and Public Spaces**

Have you ever wondered why risk assessments are so important for public spaces? Or if they are even needed? As it turns out, the consequences of not conducting a risk assessment can be serious, from legal liabilities and reputational damage to increased risks of accidents and injuries. In this article, we will explore the importance of risk assessments for public spaces, how to conduct a risk assessment, and the benefits and consequences of doing so. Whether you are responsible for managing a public space or just want to learn more about risk management, this article is for you.

Public spaces, such as city parks, recreational facilities and stadiums are places where people come together to socialize, exercise and enjoy leisure activities. While these spaces can be great sources of fun and community, they also present certain risks that must be managed to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all visitors. That is where risk assessments come in.

### **What is a risk assessment for public spaces?**

A risk assessment for public spaces is a systematic evaluation of the potential risks associated with a particular public space. It helps organizations that manage public spaces identify, assess and prioritize risks so they can take appropriate steps to mitigate or manage them. This includes evaluating the physical layout of the space or venue, the types of activities that take place there, and the potential hazards that could arise.

### **Conducting a risk assessment for a public space involves several steps:**

#### **1. Identify the potential hazards**

1. Begin by identifying the potential hazards that could be present in the public space

2. Include physical hazards, such as trip hazards or hazardous materials, or human factors, such as overcrowding or inadequate supervision
2. **Assess the likelihood and impact of each hazard**
  1. Once you have identified the potential hazards, evaluate the likelihood that each hazard will occur and the potential impact it could have
  2. Prioritize the risks that need to be addressed first
3. **Develop a plan to manage or mitigate the risks**
  1. Based on your assessment of the likelihood and impact of each hazard, develop a plan to manage or mitigate the risks
  2. Include risk controls such as signage, fencing, supervision, or developing emergency response plans
4. **Review and update the risk assessment regularly**
  1. Risk assessments should be reviewed and updated regularly to ensure they continue to accurately reflect the risks present in the public space
  2. This is especially important if the public space undergoes any changes, such as new construction or changes to the types of activities that take place there

### **Benefits of conducting a risk assessment for public spaces**

Many organizations, both public and private, have been recognized for their commitment to public safety. These organizations may have implemented effective risk management practices, such as conducting regular risk assessments and implementing appropriate controls, to ensure the safety of their public spaces. There are many benefits to conducting a risk assessment for public spaces, including:

- **Improved safety:** By identifying and addressing potential hazards, risk assessments can help prevent accidents and injuries in public spaces

- **Compliance with regulations:** Many public spaces are subject to specific regulations, such as health and safety laws, that require organizations to conduct risk assessments. Conducting a risk assessment can help ensure compliance with these regulations.
- **Reduced costs:** By identifying and addressing potential risks, risk assessments can help reduce costs associated with accidents and injuries, such as medical expenses, lost productivity, and legal fees
- **Improved reputation:** By taking steps to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the visitors to a public space, organizations can improve their reputation and build trust with the community.
- **Increased use and enjoyment of the public space:** When people feel safe and secure in a public space, they are more likely to visit and engage in activities provided there. This can also contribute to increased economic benefits for the surrounding communities.

### **A few key areas to look at for reducing risk in public spaces**

Accidents and injuries in public spaces can occur due to a variety of factors, such as physical hazards, human error or inadequate supervision. [According to Injury Facts®](#), poisoning, motor vehicle incidents and falls account for over 86% of all preventable deaths. Many of these falls occur in public spaces. Other common causes of injuries in public spaces include sports and recreation activities, motor vehicle crashes and physical violence incidents. There are a lot of areas to investigate when identifying and mitigating risks in the public sector. Here are a few key points I've highlighted that should be in every risk assessment by default.

- **Physical layout:** Consider the physical layout of the public space, including the terrain, buildings and other structures. Look for any potential hazards that could pose a risk to visitors, such as trip hazards, steep slopes or unstable structures.

- **Types of activities:** Consider the types of activities that take place in the public space, and evaluate the potential risks associated with each activity. For example, sports activities may present the risk of injury, while food vendors may present the risk of food poisoning.
- **Potential hazards:** Identify any potential hazards that could be present in the public space, such as hazardous materials, electrical wiring or environmental factors such as extreme weather
- **Visitors:** Consider the characteristics and needs of the visitors to the public space, including their age, mobility and any special needs to help identify potential risks that may not be apparent to everyone
- **Emergency response:** Evaluate the public space's emergency response capabilities, including the availability of first aid supplies, the proximity of emergency services, and the availability of trained staff to respond to emergencies
- **Maintenance:** Consider the maintenance and upkeep of the public space, including the frequency of inspections and the adequacy of maintenance procedures

By evaluating these key areas, you can identify the potential risks present in a public space and develop a plan to manage or mitigate those risks.

### **Consequences of not conducting risk assessments in public spaces**

While it is not possible to eliminate the risk of accidents or injuries in public spaces entirely, conducting risk assessments and implementing appropriate controls can help reduce the likelihood of these events occurring. It is important for organizations that manage public spaces to take a proactive approach to risk management and to regularly review and update their risk assessments to ensure the safety and wellbeing

of visitors. Failing to conduct risk assessments for public spaces can have serious consequences, including:

- **Increased risk of accidents and injuries:** Without a risk assessment, potential hazards in a public space may not be identified and addressed, which can increase the risk of accidents and injuries to visitors
- **Legal liabilities:** Many public spaces are subject to specific regulations, such as health and safety laws, that require organizations to conduct risk assessments. Failing to conduct a risk assessment can result in legal liabilities, such as fines or lawsuits.
- **Damage to reputation:** Accidents or injuries in a public space can lead to negative publicity and damage the reputation of the organization responsible for the space
- **Loss of revenue:** If individuals are injured or feel unsafe in a public space they may be less likely to visit, which can lead to a loss of revenue for the organization
- **Reduced use and enjoyment of the public space:** When people feel unsafe or are concerned about potential risks in a public space, they may be less likely to visit and engage in activities there. This can reduce the use and enjoyment of the space, as well as the economic benefits it brings to the surrounding community.

## Summary

It is important for organizations that manage public spaces to take risk assessments seriously and to conduct them regularly to ensure the safety and wellbeing of visitors. This involves identifying potential hazards, assessing the likelihood and impact of those hazards, and implementing appropriate controls or procedures to manage or mitigate the risks. The consequences of not conducting risk assessments can be significant, including increased costs associated with accidents and injuries. By taking these steps,

organizations can reduce the risk of accidents and injuries, comply with regulations, and protect their reputation and financial health.



### About the Author

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Sources:

<https://injuryfacts.nsc.org/>

Fatality data: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (NCIPC), Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (WISQARS).

Nonfatal data: National Electronic Injury Surveillance System (NEISS) All Injury Program, Office of Statistics and Programming, NCIPC, CDC, WISQARS, and the Consumer Product Safety Commission.

<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/accidental-injury.htm>

<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/>