



# ToThePOINT Workplace Fitness Centers

## Promoting Fitness, Protecting People

Many employers have developed employee wellness programs that can include fitness centers located at the worksite. Installation of on-site employee fitness centers can raise safety concerns for the employer. Employee participation in fitness programs, use of fitness center facilities and operation of fitness equipment are all potential avenues for injury and even liability back to the employer. Events to be concerned with include:

- Injury caused by improper maintenance of equipment.
- Slips, trips and falls over equipment power cords, exercise equipment or in wet areas like showers.
- Musculoskeletal sprains, shortness of breath or heart attack from overzealous exercising.
- Assault by personal trainers.
- Infection caused by contact with unclean equipment or locker rooms.

### Avoiding Liability Pitfalls

There are several liability pitfalls that fitness centers can easily avoid. Many facility owners may rely on hold harmless agreements or liability waivers. However, in some instances, fitness center waivers may not be sufficiently protecting organizations from liability.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to using waivers, employers are advised to mitigate the factors that can lead to fitness center-related injury.

- Ensure that equipment is installed according to the manufacturer's instructions – including proper clearance around the equipment.
- Provide live, documented facility orientation sessions to users. Perform and document weekly inspections of all equipment.
- Maintain records of equipment repairs and maintenance.



Background checks should be conducted on all personal trainers, including verification of certification credentials. Certifying organizations include the American Council on Exercise, the American College of Sports Medicine, and the National Strength and Conditioning Association.

### Fitness Center Management Best Practices

It is critical that employers proactively manage the risk of injury through the use of a well developed fitness center management program. A good general reference is the American College of Sports Medicine's ACSM's Health/

Fitness Facility Standards and Guidelines. Listed below are a few management best practices to promote fitness while protecting people in workplace fitness centers.

### Administration

- An attendant, card key or sign in book should be available. The log should document time the employee entered facility and the time exited.
- Hold harmless waiver agreements should be developed and signed by all users of the facility.
- Employees using the facility should have a physical from their health care provider clearing them for workouts. The company should develop a form signed by employees that they are medically cleared to work out.
- AED"s should be made available and employees should be trained on the use of the defibrillator as required by state laws.
- Shirts, shorts and shoes should be required. Sports bras without tops, cut-offs and sandals should be prohibited.
- Housekeeping procedures should be developed.
  - All equipment should be returned to its proper place after use.
  - Equipment should be wiped down after use.

- Personal trainers should undergo thorough background checks.

### Facility

- An emergency phone and/or panic button should be available and easily visible. The phone and/or call button should be directly tied into the receptionist desk or security system.
- First Aid kits should be available in the facility and an Automatic External Defibrillator (AED) should be available within a 3 minute travel of the fitness center.
- Drinking water should be available within reasonable proximity of the fitness center. Other food or drink should be prohibited.
- The room should have adequate ventilation to exhaust stale air and provide fresh air to the room.
- Hard surface flooring or rubber matting is preferred over carpeting for ease of cleaning.
- If showers are provided, slip resistant flooring and/or slip resistant mats should be used.

### Equipment

- Equipment should be inspected at least weekly. A "Do Not Use" tag should be attached to equipment that is out of

service. There should be a contact number for the user to call if they feel equipment is unsafe or needs repairs.

- The layout of the equipment and walking routes should be set up to prevent trip hazards for electrical cords.
- All employees who are using the equipment should be trained in its use and the training documented.
- All equipment should be equipped with auto-stop.

### Cited References:

<sup>1</sup> <http://athleticbusiness.com/articles/article.aspx?articleid=3579&zoneid=28>

### Other References:

<http://www.webmd.com/fitness-exercise/features/6-health-risks-to-avoid-at-the-gym>

