

FITNESS CENTER USE

Many faith-based organizations promote wellness in a variety of ways such as health screenings and fitness incentives. Although this may be a positive benefit for staff and church members and a way to encourage healthy lifestyles, there are consequences to consider and proactive risk management strategies that should be considered.

Possible benefits of facility fitness areas include:

- Improved health and fitness for church members and staff
- Community building, increased morale, camaraderie, fun and convenience
- Staff and membership retention

Potential risks of allowing fitness facility use by employees include:

- Injuries from unsafe use
- A potential for an increase in harassment or other claims and lawsuits due to increased use of the facilities
- Inadequate supervision of fitness center users



RISK REDUCTION CONSIDERATIONS

Establish clear procedures that address:

- Hours of use
- Staffing, if applicable
- Pre-approval/registration process, including a signed waiver that clearly states fitness center users take personal responsibility for any injuries
- Fitness center rules - provide all users with a copy rules upon registration and on an annual basis, and have them sign off that they received a copy

- Requiring approval of medical doctor for use of the center by anyone over the age of 50
- Restrict use of weight machines and free weights by anyone under the age of 16; require parental approval for anyone ages 16 – 18
- Instructions for appropriate use of room and each piece of equipment
- Cleaning of equipment, including frequency and type of cleaning agent
- Recommendation to utilize a “buddy system” when accessing fitness center and equipment, if staff is not present
- What to do in the event of a medical emergency
- Periodic checks of the fitness center and any changing rooms to make sure there is no delay in response should someone need assistance when utilizing the fitness center alone

- Consideration to place a portable “panic” button in the center in case assistance is needed in an emergency
- Consideration for supplying an automatic external defibrillator available for use in the fitness center
- Posting of emergency numbers and access to a telephone

CONCLUSION

While you may want to encourage congregation members and staff to keep fit, it’s important for each faith-based organization to determine if the benefits are worth the risk before initiating a fitness center.