



Toboggan hill SAFETY

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As the snow starts to fly, children young and old think of winter fun.

Tobogganing is one of several great outdoor sports that make Canada's cold, snowy winters more bearable and very enjoyable. There are toboggan hills in most towns and municipalities whether they are designed toboggan hills or just a sloped section of land that local residents have been using for sledding. The municipality's risk of liability increases when tobogganing takes place on municipally owned property.

In spite of all the fun, every year emergency rooms treat many children injured on the slopes. Whether by falls or collisions, tobogganers break bones and suffer head injuries, abrasions, cuts and sprains.

We encourage municipalities to take an active risk management approach when looking at their toboggan hills. Care and preplanning can greatly reduce injuries and liability. Not only is there a need to minimize your exposure to liability, but more importantly, to avoid unnecessary injury or death to the public.

Under the *Manitoba Occupier's Liability Act*, municipalities may have a statutory obligation to ensure that anyone entering their property is reasonably safe while on the premises. Thus a decision to permit a toboggan hill should come with a commitment to manage the risk.

If there is an awareness of even casual use of municipal property such as parks or undeveloped land for tobogganing, it is appropriate to regularly inspect the site for hazards that could result in injuries.

PREPLANNING:

- Check hill location before covered with snow, if possible.
- Choose a hill with a gentle slope (recommended maximum-40° slope).



- Ensure that ground surface is even and the hill is free of obstructions along the sled paths (stumps, roots, bumps, rocks etc).
- If obstructions cannot be removed, install hay bales around any possible impact point to protect sliders.
- Fill in holes and round off bumps to eliminate sharp drop-offs.
- Mark any drop-off areas near the slide runs with warning signs and create sloped barriers before these drop offs that will turn wayward sliders back toward the proper slide runs.
- Plan toboggan runs to ensure that sliders have a clear path to slide and an adequate slow-down area at the bottom that is clear of obstructions.
- Designate specific usage for the runs. Do not mix tobogganers and snowboarders. Offer separate designated runs if both activities are to be allowed.
- Hills should have run-offs long enough for a natural stop.
- Frozen creeks or lake, roads and parking lots are not good end-points for toboggan runs and should be avoided.
- Signage and barriers may be necessary to prohibit use in certain locations where serious hazards exist.
- Post signs to warn of potential dangers and hazards such as drop-offs and rough terrain in areas that should not be used for tobogganing.
- Lighting should be provided if the hill is open at night. (If not lit – signage should reflect that the hill is not lit and is only open from 8:00 am to dusk).
- Parking should be located far enough away from the hill so sliders don't end up near vehicles or roadways.
- Keep garbage off the hill by providing receptacles near the parking area.

SIGNAGE SUGGESTIONS:

- This is an Unsupervised Toboggan Hill – Use at your own Risk!
- The Use of Safety Helmets is Highly Recommended.
- Hours of Operation: 8am to Dusk (if not lit).
- Tuck in scarves, drawstrings and long toques.
- Wait until path is clear before starting down the hill.
- Always sit or kneel facing forward. Do Not slide head first!
- Quickly get out of the way when you reach the bottom.
- Keep to the side of the hill away from the slide paths when climbing back up the hill.
- Alcohol is strictly forbidden on this property.
- Unsafe or hazardous activities can result in ejection from the park.
- Call 911 in case of Emergency. The nearest public telephone is located at _____.
- The RM of _____ is not responsible for any injuries, damages or loss of personal items.

RISK MANAGEMENT:

Locations that are designated and/or recognized as winter recreation sites require considerably more care than casual use areas. The fact that the municipality recognizes and/or promotes a particular location results in the responsibility to safeguard the public that uses the site.

These locations require removal of obvious hazards with regular inspections and a good documentation system that records the regular inspection results and any work done to remediate any problems discovered during the inspections.

- Jumps and ramps should not be allowed in the sledding area and should be removed whenever found.
- Inspect the hills regularly (at least weekly) and document all inspections and maintenance work.
- Vandals can cause damage and create hazards for sliders – regular checks reduce and correct problems.
- Check snow cover to ensure there is adequate snow so sliders do not contact exposed ground. (12" [30 cm] of snow cover is recommended).
- Close the hill after an ice storm that makes the hill dangerous.

Tobogganing is a great sport for all ages, but has the potential for serious injury if not managed properly.

Taking the time to plan out a hill that has few hazards and obstructions and taking the care to regularly inspect and maintain the hill in good condition will greatly reduce injuries and your liability.

For additional information or questions please contact **Ken Fingler** at HED Insurance and Risk Services at 1-800-665-8990 ext. 7279 or at kfingler@hedinc.com



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