

Mitigating hazards: protecting players and patrons at ballfields

By Drew Brien

From baseball and softball to soccer and multi-use fields, these activities bring communities together, but they also introduce safety concerns, particularly from stray balls that can cause injury or property damage.

While members are generally not held responsible for the skill level of players using public fields, liability may arise if the layout or condition of a facility presents a foreseeable risk to residents, spectators, or nearby properties. Additionally, established industry standards may create a duty for members to implement protective measures such as fencing or netting.

In many communities, athletic fields are located adjacent to other public spaces such as playgrounds, walking paths, schools, and residential areas. Effective separation using fencing or netting ensures these shared spaces can safely coexist. Moreover, these barriers contribute to a well-maintained and professional appearance that reflects the member's commitment to public safety.

Protective fencing and netting play a crucial role in creating a safe recreational environment. When properly selected and installed, these barriers help prevent injuries to players, coaches, and spectators, while also protecting nearby structures like homes, vehicles, or public amenities.

Once a member decides to install protective fencing or netting, it is important to work with qualified professionals experienced in sports facility safety. Proper installation is only the first step - routine inspection, maintenance and documentation are essential to ensure the barriers remain in good working condition and to be able to defend against potential claims.

Barriers that are worn, damaged, or improperly maintained can undermine safety and expose the member to liability. To mitigate risk, members should establish a documented schedule for inspecting fencing and netting and promptly address any issues. All inspection and maintenance records should be retained according to [Washington State Local Government Common Records Retention Schedule \(CORE\)](#).

By proactively addressing safety at athletic fields, members not only reduce the potential for accidents and liability - they also demonstrate a clear commitment to the well-being of their communities. Investing in protective fencing and netting is a practical step that ensures public recreational spaces remain safe and enjoyable for all.

Resources:

[PAR 09 Ballfields](#)

[PAR 09.01 Sample Safety Checklist](#)

[PAR 09.02 Softball Baseball Field Inspection Sample Checklist](#)

Please feel free to reach out to Risk Services to discuss any issues relating to your ballfields; we look forward to hearing from our members!