

Are You Talking Safety?

A good safety plan is not a bound plan sitting on a shelf, but an active, participatory approach to increasing safety awareness across your league's membership.

If you want to increase the impact of your league's safety plan this season, start talking about safety and asking for input. One of the founding ideas of the ASAP program is that "if you talk about safety, people might think about safety, and then take action to make it safer," as one early participant explained it.

Start a New Safety Course

As you continue your season, chart a new course.

Talk about safety and ask for help from all your participants in tackling safety issues. You don't have to add a thing to your already submitted safety plan to do this; just talk about the things you already do to improve safety awareness. Keep people talking about safety and actions will start to change, which will help create an environment that avoids preventable accidents.

Gather Feedback, Gain Support

Team moms, players, coaches, umpires, concession volunteers, board members and facilities crews should all be asked for help in implementing your safety plan and looking for ways to improve it. At board meetings, in league newsletters or posters, even in team meetings, ask your members to spend some time addressing safety issues and take action on any concerns, before an accident happens. Put out "Safety Suggestion" boxes at a central location to gather ideas from these meetings.

Make sure you follow up on suggestions, even if you just tell the person the idea will be put into a "future plans" section of the safety plan and reviewed annually. People want to help, but they want to know their input was valued, or they will stop giving feedback.

If you have a league newsletter or website, publish the suggestions you receive as a way of spreading the safety message and recognizing the effort made. This will then help to prompt others in making suggestions. Create player safety poster competitions or awards for players who spot safety concerns.

Leagues are great about looking at the causes of an accident after it occurs. Talking about factors that can

cause an accident at team meetings and in gatherings of parents and other volunteers will help to keep accidents from happening.

Keep Improving Your Plan

Here's a second idea: No safety plan is complete. Even the best safety plan in the country needs to be looked at and improved. Make sure you keep updating your plan with the ideas and suggestions you implement throughout the season. Then, it will be easy to present the new safety plan to the board next season and have it approved and submitted in plenty of time.

And make copies, electronically and in hardcopies. Every year, people call the ASAP Hotline looking for the plan their league submitted last year. This is a request that shouldn't be necessary, as you should have back-ups on disks or just paper copies with others in the league. So even if your computer crashes, you will still have a copy.

Drop in Accidents Slowing

Why is the slowing decline in accidents important? The overall trend in injuries has been dramatically reduced since ASAP began in 1995, dropping 77 percent. However, in the last several years, the number of injuries has hit a plateau, even though more leagues are submitting safety plans, as leagues continue to have injuries despite having safety plans.

Some injuries are unavoidable. But some injuries could be avoided if the proper steps had been taken to protect players and volunteers. It takes work, and it takes everyone's participation. No matter how good you are as a safety officer, it takes an entire league to reduce injuries. Let's talk safety to help reduce injuries.