



# High Ropes Courses

Recreational activities are pillars of summer/winter camp, summer school, and recreational center experiences. They provide an opportunity for socialization and learning in a fun setting. These activities also provide an increased liability and potential for staff and/or participant injury. The safety of participants and staff should be standard operating procedure. It should be completed to the highest professional standards and in line with federal, state, local, and accrediting agency guidelines. The following checklist template provides a high level oversight to assist with your activity structure. Your organization is responsible for the development of your own written program guidelines and policies for the oversight of your activities. Through consistent management and preventative programs, exposures can be reduced to help ensure a safe recreational experience.

High Ropes Courses, which may include ziplines amongst other height related challenges are fun team building and personal confidence building activities when done safely. Falls account for the majority of high ropes and zipline fatalities, with the leading cause due to human error and equipment failure, making the design, inspection and maintenance key to safe operations.

## Pre-Activity:

- Established written program which outline participant guidelines, participant assessment, liability waivers, instructor requirements, training, emergency action plan, and other additional criteria as determined by the program and in line with local, state, federal, and accrediting agency guidelines.
- Participant assessment protocols in place and completed in line with internal written policies. This includes emotional and physical assessment of each participant to evaluate their ability to safely participate in the activity.
- Participant files contain emergency contact information and legal counsel reviewed liability waivers signed by legal guardians.
  - File maintained in line with written policy.
  - Kept in a secure location.
- Active and updated training program specific to the exposure.
  - Completed in line with established written policies.
  - Overseen by qualified and competent staff.
  - Done prior to start of the activity.
  - Retraining completed per internal written policy.
- Staff to participant ratios maintained throughout the activity per written policy and in line with state and accrediting agency guidelines.
- If program uses a third party service for the activity, adequate risk transfer control in place.
  - Formal contract between organization and service.
  - Verify certificates of insurance with adequate limits.
  - Additional Insured status.
  - Hold Harmless language.

*Continued >>*

- See [Nationwide's Risk Transfer resource](#) for additional information on how to protect your organization.

## Design:

- High ropes courses are not federally regulated, which means they can vary by state, county, and even city, so it is important to know your specific standards. ANSI and ASTM have developed specific standards which relate to ziplines. ANSI accredited associations include the Professional Ropes Course Association and the ACCT.
- Are staff qualified to provide oversight on the course, including applicable state/local certifications, and have recent and applicable experience in high ropes courses?
- Staff should be familiar with the course, safe traversal of each element, and minimum requirements for participants (weight, height, proper personal protective equipment [PPE]).
- A qualified individual, which may vary by state/local guidelines but has current and documented experience in construction of the risks specific type of course, should be hired to evaluate the design of the course.

## Inspection:

- Daily inspection of the cables and course elements should occur to look for broken, damage, or loose wires; diameter reduction of the cable or elements.
- Before each use, inspect fall protection safety gear (such as harnesses, helmets, lanyards, carabiners, pulleys, and trolleys) for tears, fraying, cracking, distortion, and damage. Replace if they show any sign of damage.
- An inspection checklist should be utilized, with employee sign off, and kept on file.

## Maintenance:

- Each element of the challenge course should be routinely inspected by staff, and by qualified contractors such as the course designer.
- Are safety equipment, course elements, and cables removed from service if they are not in good repair?
- Train operators during orientation and then again annually on safe ropes course operations.
- Post rules conspicuously and provide participants with an overview of proper usage of PPE and ropes course safety.
- Make sure participants meet the proper height and weight for your zipline, and are equipped with the proper PPE.

## For Additional Information:

[The Association for Challenge Course Technology \(ACCT\)](#)

[Professional Ropes Course Association](#)

[American Camp Association: Challenge Course and Zip Line Safety](#)

[American Mountain Guide Association](#)

Providing solutions  
to help our members  
manage risk.®

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and safety needs, contact  
Nationwide Loss Control  
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