

Aerial Silks

What to Consider if your School Introduces this New Activity

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Aerial silks, the new trend in physical fitness, are making their way into Colorado schools. This activity consists of one or more acrobats climbing, twisting, spinning, dropping, and contorting themselves using lengths of fabric secured to the ceiling, wrapping and unwrapping themselves in the fabric while suspended in the air. Like any gymnastic-like activity, aerial silk use comes with a wide array of injury related risks. Minor injuries can include fabric burns, bruises, sprains, and dizziness. More serious injuries can include broken legs, broken arms, concussions, paralysis and even death.

Coverage

CSDSIP's School Entity Liability (SEL) policy covers our Members' self-sponsored activities, and we have no SEL exclusions specific to aerial activities, though this would be considered a high-risk activity. Remember that SEL coverage extends to Member employees, volunteers, and Board Members while they are acting within the course and scope of their duties for our Member. The SEL coverage does **not** cover any third party that the Member may use or rent equipment from, nor does it cover students participating in these activities. Both students and third parties should be made aware that they are responsible for their own accident/health insurance coverage while participating in any Member activity, particularly one that is high-risk.

Controlling Risk

Members should seriously consider potential benefits and drawbacks before approving such a high-risk activity. Our Risk Management specialists recommend that Members address the following before approving the use of aerial silks on your premises:

Rigging

How will the silk cloths attach to the ceiling? Installing a rigging system that supports the use of these aerial silks would fall under "Installation of Recreation Equipment Supported by Structure", therefore Members would be required to submit a [Small Project Submittal](#) for permitting to the Colorado Department of Public Safety Division of Fire Prevention and Control. Rigging should be installed by a certified rigger with experience in installing for aerial acrobatics and have a qualified person inspect your rigging on a regular basis to maintain equipment safety.

Aerial Silks

Safety Mats

Cover the floor with proper impact-tested mats to help prevent injury from falls. The American Society of Testing and Materials International (ASTMI) has established ASTM F1081 - 09(2015) [Standard Specification for Competition Wrestling Mats](#) as a basic guideline to assist schools, athletic directors and coaches in understanding the types of foam available and general information about mat construction and use. Use these standards as a best practice to guide what type of mats will work for aerial silk practice. Always purchase a mat that meets or exceeds the ASTM standards for impact protection. Avoid basing your mat purchase solely on the thickness of the foam since different foam types perform differently. Request documentation from the manufacturer that the mat you are considering meets the ASTM F 355-16e1 [Standard Test Method for Impact Attenuation of Materials Used for Athletics, Recreation and Play](#). Also ensure proper mat care and handling, as these are essential in protecting the health and safety of all participants, and plan to inspect the mats for damage at regular intervals.

Training and Supervision

Prohibit use of your equipment by any individuals who have not received proper training by a qualified instructor. Make sure instructor qualifications are known and documented, and properly qualified people are available to both instruct and supervise participants. Always ensure adequate supervision relative to the number of participants.

Safety Plan/ Emergency Response Plan

Document and save your administrative/board approved safety process including applicable policies and procedures for easy access and be sure to train applicable staff and volunteers before implementing the activity. Ensure participants understand all expectations and agree to follow all safety policies and procedures. Prepare for emergencies. Is there a first aid kit available? Will someone trained in first aid/CPR be present during the activity? Make sure all participants, staff, and volunteers understand what to do in case of emergency.

Waivers/Insurance

Properly written waivers provide information for parents regarding school activities and allow them to give their informed consent before allowing minors to participate. Waivers must explain potential risks and injuries in detail so that parents and legal guardians understand potential exposure to danger. They also need to inform parents that students participating in these activities are responsible for their own



Aerial Silks

accident/health coverage. Finally, include information such as activity location, qualifications of supervision/instruction provided, and information regarding costs participants could incur through their participation in this activity should they need to travel.

Conclusion

We understand the desire to introduce new and exciting athletic offerings to keep your students engaged. Offering aerial silk activities to your community can certainly achieve this goal, however because the activity is high-risk, proper preparation is especially important. If you have questions about aerial silks or any other activities, please reach out to our Risk Control Team at 303.722.2600.