It’s June and ski resorts are shifting gears from winter to summer operations on the fly with some running operations concurrently. A big part of summertime operations now consists of amusement attractions such as water features, alpine slides, mountain coasters, airbags, adventure courses, bike parks, and aerial zips just to name a few. A question every resort needs to ask is when snow turns into water and parkas turn into bathing suits, “Are we maintaining the same attention to detail now toward our safety and liability exposure? Now that many ski resorts are four-season resorts, downtime has virtually disappeared. You need to be on your “A game” just as much during the summer season as during ski season. Maybe more so.

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There are three areas of focus that your resort needs to consider for summer operations: contracts, staffing, and statutes.

Contracts: Bringing amusement features to a ski resort involves more than writing a check and having resort staff install that product. Responsibility for the amusement feature should be spread to the three parties primarily involved in this process: the manufacturer, the installation company, and the resort. Each party involved needs to take responsibility for their portion of the project. It is important that the contract in place clearly states who is responsible for what and that the resort is not taking on liability that belongs to another party. The more complex the project, the more complex the contract language can be in regards to that responsibility and indemnity. Well-known companies within the industry can be a good place to start but you will still need to do your homework. Those newer vendors producing the newsstand’s most exciting feature of the summer may not have a well-written contract. This could force you to do more work on the front end in order to protect yourself. Regardless of what company you choose to go with, it is always a good idea to have legal counsel review the contracts before they are executed. This will help minimize your resort’s responsibility for an injury or loss due to a defect in the product or a miscalculation during the installation process. You do not want to incur liability that is caused by another party.

Staffing: A resort’s first line of defense is the ground level employees who interact directly with guests. Amusement attraction attendants not only have a direct effect on the guests’ overall experience, they also play a crucial role in the safety of those guests. So what are the best practices for a resort with regard to their ground-level staffing? Here are some ideas:

• Start with an adequate number of staff members. Manufacturer’s recommendations/specifications of an attraction can be a guide to the minimum number of employees necessary to safely operate that specific attraction. In many cases additional staff will be required. This does not mean you need to overstaff every attraction. Employees that have the training required to run more than one amusement attraction can be a huge asset by covering for unexpected increases in guests or absent staff.

• Proper training serves three purposes by giving the employee:

  1. The proper knowledge and ability to safely operate a particular attraction.
  2. The confidence to educate a guest on how to properly use that attraction.
  3. The ability to be able to react accordingly on any given operational issue.
When staffing a particular attraction, ensure that the employees present are properly trained or certified. Adequate training is a broad term. Staying compliant with manufacturer’s specifications can be a key part of upholding the attraction contract signed at the beginning of the season. Some training may be offered by the manufacturer directly, while other training may be offered from an outside vendor or the installation company. Not all manufacturers or installation companies offer certified training. This may be an additional expense for the resort when an outside vendor is needed to provide that training.

**Remember, good training is documented training!**

- Employee placement. Place employees in positions where their strong points are best utilized. There are certain positions that will require an employee to not only perform a particular job, but may also require that same employee to step in and make a judgment call or enforce a rule. Some employees are more suited to certain positions than others.

Imagine for a moment a busy holiday weekend. Your resort has an adequate number of well trained employees strategically positioned at each amusement device to ensure each attraction runs properly and safely. But who oversees the big picture and the individual ground level employees? Who is looking down from 30,000 feet when the captain turns off the fasten seatbelt sign and guests are free to move about? This staff member, your operations manager, or whatever title you want to give, should be the person in place to run the show from a high level perspective and tie everything together.

Each individual attraction is like an island functioning just fine on its own during operational hours. A resort’s operations manager is there to make sure the waters between the islands are safe and well maintained while the resort is open to the public. If an employee misses a shift, it’s the operations manager’s job to move someone from the well-staffed ride to the area in need. This operations manager is also there to take charge in an event the waters become unsafe or an incident occurs.

Beyond the day-to-day activities, the operations manager is there pre- and post-season to keep the individual attractions, and the resort as a whole, compliant with manufacturer’s specifications/recommendations and state regulations. Most attractions are required to have annual inspections. Some states require independent, third-party inspections — while other states allow attraction owners to become licensed inspectors themselves. It is up to each resort to follow manufacturer specifications/recommendations for each attraction and follow state regulations to maintain compliance.

Good communications between the resort employees, the operations manager, the manufacturer and the state, allow the attractions and resorts that operate these attractions, to run safely and smoothly — all while keeping up with changes in the industry.

**Statutes:** Thirty one states have some form of a ski statute or “inherent risk” legislation geared towards the protection of ski resorts. The language is specific to the act of “skiing”. Although summer operations occur on a ski resort, they are not protected by ski statutes or legislation specific to the act of skiing. This is why it is so important to keep the same level of focus when it comes to summertime amusement.

Many of the activities resorts incorporate into their summer operations have some level of risk. This is why it is particularly important to operate at the highest level of safety possible and help every guest have a positive experience. Follow the principle of loss prevention through good risk management practices and planning: partner with industry experts and reach out to your risk management team from your insurance provider.

For more information regarding this topic, contact your Safehold Special Risk sales executive.