Flagging, fencing, ropes, and signage: best practices

This time of year many resorts are putting together budgets for items needed for next ski season. Based on observations during ski area visits this past season, below are best practices recommendations by loss control consultant, Wally Shank relative to flagging, fencing, ropes, and padding.

- **Flagging.** I am a strong advocate of bright orange vinyl-coated polyester mesh flagging. Surveyor ribbon, while inexpensive, is usually good for only one season as it fades quickly and tears easily, so it’s not recommended. Weave the ribbon through the rope; don’t tie it on. Ribbon woven through the rope stays in place while tied ribbon is subject to sliding and bunching up. Most resorts cut their ribbons about 16” long so when woven through the rope, two ribbons 8” long dangle and are highly visible. Most resorts space ribbons about every 10 feet. A 300’ roll of vinyl-coated polyester mesh ribbon will cost about $15.

- **Fencing.** Four-foot orange net fence appears to have the best visibility. I caution against using blue net fencing because under some sunny conditions the fence is difficult to see against the snow. If you often have to put up and take down the fence, composite poles can be woven into the fence about every ten feet, but composite poles are relative expensive ($7 each vs. about $1.50 for bamboo poles). Net fencing costs about $1 per foot.

- **Rope.** Most resorts use three-strand black and orange, or black and yellow rope. I find these much more visible than solid-color rope. The three-strand rope is very easy to weave the orange flagging into. You’ll need bamboo poles about every 25 feet to support this rope. The rope generally comes in 600-foot spools, at about $42 each.

- **Poles.** Though other materials are available, bamboo is most frequently used and by far the least expensive at about $1.50 for an 8’ x 1’ polyethylene wrapped pole. It’s usually available in blue, red, or black and orange. The black and orange tends to offer greatest visibility and is most widely used. Budget about $70 for a bundle of 50 poles.

- **Padding.** Pads come in a wide variety of sizes and colors. Four-foot x 5’ x 4” yellow pads are most common on lift towers and seem to offer the highest visibility. Resorts choose to pad a variety of things beside lift towers, and pads can be custom-made for each application: trail signs, light poles, snowmaking equipment, etc., and cost between $50 and $300. Once you decide to pad an object, try to consistently pad all similar objects. Pads are available in red, orange, yellow, green, blue, gray, and black. A 4’ x 5’ x 4” chairlift tower pad with three straps costs about $200.

- **Willy Bags.** A Willy Bag is a big styrofoam-peanut filled vinyl bag – usually blue. They’re made primarily to use along race courses and are thick enough to provide deceleration when struck by a person. I have observed quite a few resorts storing Willy Bags at the base of their lifts to be used if someone misloads the lift. These lightweight bags can be quickly pulled by the lift operator and placed beneath the dangling skier until help arrives. If the skier can’t hang on, it offers something better to fall on than hard-packed snow. Willy Bags cost about $100.

- **Signs.** Ski-lift signs are detailed in ANSI B-77.1-2006 Annex D. Many resorts have these signs up-to-date but some have not. Also, freestyle terrain parks have a new smart style series of signs and an updated entrance sign that should be in place at the top of the park. For those without sign-making facilities, these signs are available from a number of suppliers. Before purchasing or making these signs yourself, make sure that they conform to the color, overall size, and font size recommendations. Budget $20 each for lift signs and smart style signs, and about $100 each for freestyle terrain entrance signs.

Enjoy Spring – and stay safe!

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