

POST PROM:**Make It a Memory We all Want to Remember***Tips to help keep post prom activities safe*

Prom is one of those events we all remember as high school students, but our parents feared the post-prom activities and uncertainties that came with them.

I receive many phone calls each year from schools and parent groups with questions regarding post-prom activities. Venue-related discussions often occur. For example, “Can we rent a riverboat or the local YMCA, or host at a parent’s machine shed?” Or a parent might inquire, “Can post-prom have a bouncy house, dunk tank, fireworks, live band with pyrotechnics, or a donkey basketball game?” The follow-up question from the school is usually, “Is this event covered by the school’s liability insurance?”

In this article, risk management considerations are outlined for post-prom events both on and off campus. In addition, liability insurance considerations are reviewed for school-sponsored events versus groups hosting separate, nonschool-sponsored events (oversight from the school administration or board, and running funds through the school are components of school-sponsored events).

■ School-Sponsored Post-Prom Tips

How do school personnel work to achieve a zero-accident culture at your school’s post-prom event? Following are ideas and resources to make post-prom a safe night.

- Offer plenty of activities to keep students occupied. Businesses often

rent games, so you don’t have to buy them. Think about how the games will be used. Believe it or not, the availability of dozens of bouncy balls could be problematic.

- Do not forget about adult volunteers. Offer plenty of coffee, soda with extra caffeine, and other items to help them stay alert. Develop a rotation schedule for chaperones.
- Have students sign a sober pledge. Pledges should be short, and can be signed, for example, in the cafeteria two days before prom. Here’s an example taken from the Students Against Destructive Decisions Prom Pledge:

“I want my prom to be a night I’ll remember for the rest of my life — surrounded by my best friends, full of music, dancing and fun. I don’t want anything to get in the way of those memories. I pledge to party hard, but party sober and encourage my friends to do the same. I will not ride in a car with someone who has been drinking or using drugs. Because I am your friend, I want you to pledge the same.”

- Provide a detailed itinerary of the event so everyone is on the same page. Effective communication between parents and school administration is essential.
- Make sure transportation needs are well planned. Most prom

accidents involve automobiles. Hiring a limo or using a school bus reduces this risk.

- Clearly communicate to students that alcohol, drugs, tobacco products, and weapons are not allowed at or near any school or post-prom event.

■ On Campus, School-Sponsored Post-Prom

Some schools refer to the post-prom event as “Safe Night,” and have a motto of keeping kids safe after the prom. The first risk management consideration is whether the event will be held on or off school premises. There are several benefits to having post-prom on campus:

- It reduces the risk of additional driving by students to a separate event.
- The district’s liability insurance coverage extends to the event.
- School staff can easily supervise and closely manage activities and games.
- Administration can control access by authorized attendees, the space used for the event and duration of the party.
- Law enforcement can be present at the door to refuse admittance to students who are intoxicated.
- School administration can work directly with vendors to ensure contracts are written with the school’s best interests in mind.

Venue-related questions often come up, and the follow-up question is usually, “Is this event covered by the school’s liability insurance?”

REMEMBER: The district's liability insurance policy is designed to protect the district. It also insures its employees, board members and volunteers when their efforts are provided on behalf of the school district, meaning the district has asked and authorized them to act in a certain capacity. The district's liability policy does not cease to insure the district against losses arising out of a nonschool-sponsored post-prom event. BUT, the absence of school sponsorship means the people/parents organizing and running such events should not expect protection from the district's policy before, during, or after them. For example, a district board member who also happens to help plan a nonschool-sponsored event should not expect protection from the district's insurance while working on the event because he/she is not acting as a board member while doing so.



■ Off Campus, School-Sponsored Post-Prom

Some schools choose to have post-prom offsite for many reasons; it is a tradition or students are looking for a change of scenery. Risk management considerations for hosting a safe off-campus, post-prom event include:

- Confirm the district's liability insurance does not exclude coverage for the event.
- Obtain a certificate of insurance from the host, and ask to be listed as an additional insured on their general liability policy.
- Remind hosts that no alcohol is allowed.
- Safe transportation to and from the post-prom party is essential. Some schools use their busses to transport students from school to the offsite location, and then back to the school parking lot.
- Make chaperone and staff phone numbers available, in case parents need to call.
- Have set hours for the event.
- Conduct background checks on any volunteers who are not school staff. Schools are already

required to conduct criminal background checks on staff.

- Do not allow anyone who leaves the event to return.
- Conduct breathalyzer tests for all incoming students and volunteers.

Some of these measures may seem extreme, but it is better to be proactive and prevent an incident than not. No administrator, teacher, or parent wants to have a post-prom marred by a tragic accident. Unfortunately, these accidents have occurred, and every effort should be made to prevent these tragedies by utilizing appropriate measures. If a severe injury occurs, a plaintiff's attorney will investigate what precautions were taken to prevent injuries. Keep in mind the old saying, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

■ Nonschool-Sponsored Post-Prom Events

Some parents will form their own post-prom committee, separate from the official school-endorsed event. How can the school help to assure this event is safe for the students? The school may not always be aware of these parties, but when you are aware, consider the following:

- Clearly communicate to the parents the event is not a school-sponsored activity.
- Suggest the organizing parents ask — before the day of the event — "What liability coverage is being provided for the participants and volunteers? Are the games covered?" Re-read the "Remember" above. A Special Events policy may be necessary.
- Remind parents it is illegal in Wisconsin to host underage drinking parties. Google: "Parents Who Host Lose the Most: Don't be a Party to Teenage Drinking," a Wisconsin public information campaign.

These suggestions are not a comprehensive list of precautions, or legal advice, but we hope they provide a framework for discussions in planning a fun and safe post-prom event.

Please call John Gibson at TRICOR Insurance (608) 288-1800, ext. 1714, or Yvette Statz, Director of Business Services, Argyle School District (608) 543-3318, ext. 305, with any questions. ■

John Gibson, CSRM, CIC, TRICOR Insurance, WASB Endorsed Insurance Agency.

Yvette Statz, Director of Business Services, Argyle School District.