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Introduction

Nonprofits that own their own facilities are responsible for the inspection, maintenance and repair of those facilities to prevent property damage and accidents or injury to clients, staff, visitors and vendors. Facilities are built, installed or established to serve a particular purpose: camp grounds, playgrounds, natatoriums, day care centers, and nursing homes.

Nonprofit organizations that lease facilities for providing goods and services or that rent facilities for special events, fund-raising or field trips are also responsible for inspecting and maintaining safe and secure premises.

Organizations that operate out of a residence also need to assess liability and finance potential loss. A visitor to such a residence who is injured could file a claim against the nonprofit, the homeowner or the renter, and the landlord.

A nonprofit organization's facility presents myriad possibilities for causing injuries or accidents to employees, clients, volunteers, visitors and vendors. The risk of a facility-based claim exists within the buildings and on the grounds. The specific issues that need to be addressed in managing facility risk depend on the kind of equipment, function and special uses related to the facility, as well as local and state codes and state and federal legislation. Operational risks include physical damage to its property and the property of others, which can

interfere with the provision of services and can be costly. The organization's property-related assets include grounds, buildings and equipment.

To protect itself, the organization needs to appoint someone in charge of monitoring safety, maintenance and repair. Whether the appointee is a single point person, a risk management committee or a full-time professional risk manager, someone needs to be in charge of the process or it won't happen. Checklists help streamline the process and ensure that the same points will be monitored no matter who does the actual evaluation. Manufacturer's recommendations, legal requirements, safety Web sites, historical claims data and your own experience all come into play. Remember that special-purpose facilities, such as day care, residential care, playgrounds, camps and open bodies of water, require specialized checks and maintenance to meet local, state and federal requirements. As you use your checklists, evaluate and update them to make them constantly work for you.

Each of the 10 steps represents important opportunities to protect employees, volunteers, clients, visitors and vendors from harm, while on your premises. Your efforts to protect these people will, in turn, lessen the possibility that your nonprofit will have a claim or lawsuit filed against it.