

# Safety Guide for Track and Field

*Especially written for beginning track coaches and those coaches hosting their first track meet  
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## Sprints-Hurdles:

**Starting blocks:** Starting blocks should be checked for loose connections and missing parts. On blocks that use track spikes, all should be checked for missing spikes. Spot welding the spikes to the blocks will prevent loss of spikes. Broken spikes however, will be more difficult to replace.

Transporting blocks from one starting area to another should be done with care. Wheel barrows and other top heavy carrying devices should be avoided. Dropped starting blocks can cause serious injuries to the foot and ankles.

**Starting Area-Starter:** The use of a revolver for starting creates some safety aspects. Although only blank cartridges are used, the wadding and powder are capable of injuries especially to the eyes. The starter should wear a protective device on their ears to prevent prolonged loud noises that could damage hearing. The starting pistol should be treated as a real gun, for all safety concerns. Students or young people should not be allowed to access to starting guns. The new strobe light and artificial start sounds are much safer.

**Hurdles:** All hurdles should be maintained to insure the following:

1. Crossbars are smooth and not broken or cracked.
2. All bolted or welded joints are firmly together.
3. All pull-over weights are easily movable and adjustable for the proper heights.
4. All height adjustments are free of rust and corrosion. Axle grease ensures long lasting lubrication. WD40 does not last.

**Hurdle Placement:** All hurdle marks on the track should be checked for accuracy. Hurdles should be properly lined up in a straight row and directly over the hurdle mark. Hurdles should be checked with a string or cord to insure perfect alignment. Pull-over weight adjustments should be checked before each different hurdle race at different heights.

There should be a check to insure that there are ten flights of hurdles on the track. This is especially true in the intermediate hurdles, (*eight in the 300m hurdles*).

## Middle Distance and Distance Races:

Although serious injuries are rare in distance running, care should be taken in placing too many runners in a race. Getting spiked can cause serious lacerations to the lower leg. Other bumps and falls should be avoided whenever possible. Temperature and humidity factors should be monitored carefully, especially in races over 5K. Distance races should be scheduled in the cooler part of the day. Water should be made available to all runners on hot humid days, especially in the 10K. Athletic trainers should be on alert when longer distance races are held on hot-humid days.

### Steeple Chase Barriers

Each barrier should be checked for proper height of men's and women's barriers.

The water jump should be cleaned and filled with clean water to the top. The barrier should be covered in the front to insure that a runner cannot slip under the barrier. The landing area of the water jump should be made of non-slip material.

There should be no barriers between the starting line and the finish line on the first lap.

## FIELD EVENTS:

### Shot Put

The shot put impact area should be roped, flagged or fenced or in some way protected from spectators, other athletes or officials from access to the area. This leaves the shot put officials and participating athletes in the area.

Most accidents seem to happen to officials. Cause: Not paying attention. The shot put action can occur very quickly. Many of the accidents in the shot put happen during the warm-up period. Both athletes and officials have to have a continual awareness of each others presence. Athletes should not be allowed to retrieve their own implements.

## Discus

Probably the most accidents occur in this throwing event for the following three reasons.

1. The aero dynamic design of the discus allows it to be affected by the wind.

This causes the impact area to become extremely large under windy conditions.

2. The control of the discus upon release is difficult, especially for beginners.

3. The discus continues to travel on the landing area after impact. Although serious injury is not always a factor, broken ankles and other serious foot injuries can occur.

The installation of new artificial turf compounds this situation. A discus landing on these surfaces (especially wet) will “skid” longer distances. Officials and athletes must be aware of this situation. Flagging must protect this entire area even into where the discus can “skid”.

## Javelin

The javelin, like the discus is affected by aerodynamics and the wind. The impact area can also be very large. Wind direction should be considered when placing the flagged area outside the sector lines. Like the discus, a javelin that lands flat can also “skid” for a long distance. When in doubt, place the warning flagging as far outside the sector lines as possible. Javelin throwers should not be allowed to “spike” or throw practice throws outside the competition area.

## Hammer

The hammer throw, although not affected as much by the wind as the discus and javelin, is potentially a very dangerous event. The size of the actual impact is very large because of the attached wire and handle. The “attachments” can also cause serious injury. Flagging should be placed well outside the sector lines. Spectators and cameraman should be kept well outside the sector area.

## Throwing Event Warm-up:

Warm-up throws should only be allowed in the actual event area under the supervision of the event official. An official should retrieve all throws. The athlete should not be allowed to retrieve his/her own implements. The event official should carry, not toss the implement to the side.

## Officials

Many of the injuries and deaths in the throwing events involve officials. Lack of awareness is probably the major cause. Throwing event officials have to be extremely alert and concentrate on what and where they are, and where the athletes are and what they are doing. Officials in the impact area should be aware of the abilities of that particular field so that they know who the long throwers are and can adjust their position on the field accordingly.

## Basic Rules for Track & Field Officials:

1. Always look both directions before crossing either the track or any runway to insure no runners are coming.
2. If your job ask for you to be in the infield area, you must be alert to all implements.
  - A. Never enter any throwing impact area unless your job involves marking throws or retrieving implements.
  - B. If you are assisting in marking or retrieving you will be in or near the throwing impact area, never turn your back on the throwers-during warm-ups or competition.**
  - C. If you help to handle the javelin, always carry it vertically
  - D. For hammer or discus, if you are not marking/retrieving, you must be behind the cage during all throws, both warm-up and competition.
3. If you are a head official at a throwing event, you should monitor both the warm-up and the competition to help insure safety.

4. If you are the head official at the pole vault or high jump, double check to insure that the foam landing pits are securely buckled together prior to warm-up.
5. Officials should immediately contact meet management if they are not comfortable with the safety in any situation.
6. If you are not actively involved in assisting an event. Stay out of the infield.
7. Immediately notify meet management of any injury in your area.

## Cages and Protection

A cage is not required for the shot put, but the sector should be roped off. The shot is a very fast event; officials have to be especially aware.

Cage specification for the discus and hammer cages should be checked carefully. The hammer cage should be equipped with swinging doors for either left or right handed throwers. A ladder should be kept handy to retrieve hammers that get caught in the webbing.

## Long and Triple Jump

The biggest safety factor in the long and triple jump is the proper preparation of the landing area. The sand should be dampened for accurate measurement. The sand should also be turned over and loosened. This is extremely important. Packed sand is the most frequent cause of injury. The sand should be raked for an even surface. These precautions should be followed for both practice and competition.

Care should be taken to keep rakes and shovels out of the way where they cannot be accidentally stepped on. The take-off boards should be checked for excess ware. It is important to make sure the take off boards are close enough to the sand pit to meet the level of competition.

## High Jump

The landing pad is the most important item in the high jump. Size of the pad varies with the level of competition. Practice or competition should never be allowed on a pad that does not make specifications. It is extremely important that the segments of the landing pad are properly attached together. No gaps or separations should exist. An overall landing pad should be placed over the segments and secured.

The high jump standards and cross bars should be checked. If a high jumper lands in the middle of the cross bar, it can cause the standards to topple inward causing possible injury.

The take-off area should be checked, especially in wet weather. Some surfaces are slippery when wet.

## Pole Vault

Like the High Jump, the landing pad is extremely important. In recent years, the required size and padding of the landing area has increased quite drastically. Before a practice or competition is held, the specifications of the landing area should be checked very carefully. No vaulting should occur unless ALL the pads and padding are in place. This should include the padding around the box as well as the padding for the standards.

All segments of the landing pit must be attached together. The overall pad should be in place. No gaps or separations should exist.

All scoring stands, tables, chairs, vaulting box covers, or any object should be out of the area where, if the vaulter "stalls out" they cannot possibly come down on an object that in itself could cause injury.

The beginning vaulter should be coached very carefully. It is imperative that they be placed with the properly fitted pole for their weight and ability. They should also be taught techniques of "bail out" vaults. The beginning vaulter should never be allowed to compete in a meet until he/she has demonstrated that they can clear a height in practice. Particular attention should be placed on gaining the proper steps on the runway to have a plant that is on step with the takeoff leg directly under the top hand hold. These skills should be well mastered before they are allowed to compete in a track meet.

This should all be done under the supervision of a coach. A track meet should not be an unsupervised pole vault practice session.

## Special comment:

There should be no difference in the safety procedures in a "small" meet and a large meet. Getting hit with a discus or shot doesn't have anything to do with the size of the meet.