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Risk control

Parkruns



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Introduction

Community runs and charity races are now commonplace across the UK but what impact is this having on Local Authorities and what considerations on risk do they need to take?

The concept of Parkrun began in 2004¹ and have long since been welcomed by Local Authorities in supporting health and wellbeing agendas for improving physical activity rates in communities as well as making use of public parks and open spaces.

Local authorities do not charge volunteer groups seeking to provide weekly Parkrun events for the use of public parks and open spaces². This illustrates the desire to see increasing collaboration between Local Authorities and Parkrun organisers to raise participation rates and contribute further to improving the health and wellbeing of communities.

Local Authorities

With continuing financial pressures, and responsibility for the public health of communities, Local Authorities can be innovative in their approaches to the utilisation of their parks and open spaces. Pop-up fetes, sporting events, and concerts and festivals are becoming more commonplace.

Local Authorities are keen to build strong collaborative relationships with Parkrun organisations to enable risks to be managed and events to run smoothly.

The health and safety of participants, volunteers and observers must be a serious consideration ahead of any event for both the Local Authority and the Parkrun organisers, with appropriate steps taken to manage the welfare of all relevant persons.

Parkrun UK

Parkrun UK organise free weekly runs around the world. There are currently 1,321 Parkrun events around the country taking place every weekend³. Runs are open to anyone and are free to participate in. The organisation operates through the support of sponsors and volunteers. Their aim is to have a Parkrun event in every community that wants one, and they encourage suggestions for new parks and run routes to be put forward.

Saturday morning Parkrun events are usually 5,000 metres in length, with 2,000 metre events often held on Sunday mornings for children aged between four and fourteen.

Management of Risk

Ahead of every event, Parkrun organisers and volunteers will walk the route, checking on the condition of the park, and identifying any obvious hazards for runners. A risk assessment is completed and any required remedial works to the park or re-routing of the course are undertaken ahead of the event itself. On the day of the run the route is usually indicated with direction signs and the positioning of volunteers to ensure runners stay on the designated course.

Volunteer marshals are given a briefing by the Run Director of the day and are then posted at intermittent points around the run route to provide assistance should it be required. A 'tail runner' is also appointed to be the last runner in the event.

Consideration is given to environmental conditions. Where events need to be cancelled due to unfavourable conditions, runners may receive direct notification, with the cancellation also being posted on the organisation's website.

Safety at Parkrun's is continuously under review and a significant concern of the organisers. For example, in Norwich, significantly increased numbers of participants in a local Parkrun resulted in organisers having to ban runners from bringing their dogs (excluding assistance dogs) with them as this was posing an increased risk to participants⁴. This ban did not affect any other Parkruns.

Summary

The benefits brought to local communities through the introduction of Parkrun events are many and varied. From the social benefits of interaction to health and fitness. Parkrun is all about inclusiveness and wellbeing.

Local Authorities should consider working alongside Parkrun organisers to ensure that the appropriate risk mitigations are in place to ensure participants and volunteers are protected and the events remain safe and fun as they were always intended to be.

References

- 1 Parkrun, Our story, available at:
<https://www.parkrun.com/about/our-story/>
- 2 LGA Briefing – LGA calls for further collaborative working between councils and park runs.
<https://www.local.gov.uk/>
- 3 Parkrun: Where is Parkrun, available at:
<https://www.parkrun.org.uk/>
- 4 Parkrun, Course safety, available at:
<https://www.parkrun.org.uk/norwich/course/>

Further information

For access to further RMP Resources you may find helpful in reducing your organisation's cost of risk, please access the RMP Resources or RMP Articles pages on our website. To join the debate follow us on our LinkedIn page.

Get in touch

For more information, please contact your broker, RMP risk control consultant or account director.

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