



## Off Season Football Equipment Maintenance

Once an athletic season is over and equipment is accounted for and put into storage, there may be a tendency to forget about it until new season practice comes around. This could present a serious health risk for the student athletes and a major liability exposure for the District, its programs and coaches.

All athletic equipment needs to undergo a formalized system of inspection, reconditioning and documentation. This is particularly true with high impact sports like football. If the District is to remain in compliance with National Operating Committee on Standards for Athletic Equipment (NOSCAE) standard for football helmets, each helmet must be reconditioned by a certified helmet re-conditioner that is authorized by the football helmet manufacturer for recertification of helmets.

The company performing this task must be a certified member of National Athletic Equipment Re-conditioners Association (NAERA). Recertification of football helmets is part of the recommended standard from both the manufacturers and the National Federation of High Schools.

Problems can arise when the helmets, though properly inspected, reconditioned and stored post-season are used in preseason activities, such as summer football. Careful documentation needs to be kept as to what organization or team is using any of the equipment (helmets, pads, etc.), dates of use, who it was assigned to (athlete name) and date of return.

Those helmets used must be inspected and reconditioned again prior to any subsequent use, including any use in the regular season or any intervening period of use.

### **Document**

Just doing the work is not enough; Districts need to be able to prove that adequate equipment maintenance was performed. The additional paperwork and record keeping may require time and resources, but staff time spent in litigation is far more time consuming and emotionally draining.

There should be a standardized helmet protocol implemented throughout the School District that includes set dates for post-season inspections, when reconditioning will be done and all required documentation of each helmets maintenance.

In short, all sites within a District should be following the same plan. Failure to do so can make litigation defense very difficult if the District's maintenance of equipment is called into question. No coach or athletic director wants to find themselves on the witness stand trying to explain why their program does not follow the same protocol as other sites.

It is the position of WSRMP that annual re-conditioning and re-certification must be the standard operating procedure for Districts. This protects the student athletes as well as helping make the District defensible in the event of litigation or claims. This program keeps Districts in compliance with rulings from U.S. Ninth Circuit Court that concluded in a California case annual

recertification is needed. Since Washington is also in the Ninth Circuit Court, it would be prudent to follow this appellate court's ruling.

These procedures need to be closely adhered to and compliance documented before the helmets are put into storage. The same procedure needs to be followed in conjunction with between season equipment uses. In short, the documentation needs to be checked before a helmet is given to an athlete and when it is turned in.

- Coordinate helmet recertification at the district level.
- Mark each helmet with a permanent serial number for record keeping.
- Keep a complete record of the history of each piece of equipment, including to whom each helmet was issued throughout its life, as well as the inspection, recertification and disposal.
- Have all helmets recertified annually according to NOCSAE standards.

#### Washington Schools Risk Management Pool

- Use only NAERA-certified companies for recertification of helmets.
- Physically destroy all helmets that were rejected by the re-conditioner.
- Destroy each helmet that exceeds the manufacturer's stated life span, by cutting it in half, or crushing it.
- Teach students the importance of proper fitting, inspections and maintaining equipment.
- Require student to report any suspected equipment damage, malfunction or improper fit.
- Routinely inspect all helmets assigned to students, making certain they properly fit and have not been altered in anyway.
- Do not alter equipment or helmets, in any manner, unless specified by the manufacturer or recommended by the reconditioner.
- Never use a helmet with a cracked shell.
- Check helmet fitness as compared to the agreement information provided in the manufacturer's instructions and procedures.
- Replace face guard if there is 1) bare metal showing, 2) a broken weld, and 3) a guard is grossly misshapen.
- Follow instructions provided by the manufacturer regarding care and maintenance procedures. Use only factory approved parts for replacement.
- If a helmet is loaned to a student prior to the start of the season (i.e., summer football camp), that helmet must be reconditioned again, unless assigned to the same student.
- Please note, if a serious injury occurs- helmets or other equipment involved must be retrieved by the school district and held until released by WSRMP or obtained for evidence.

#### NOCSAE

NOCSAE is a voluntary organization started in 1969 which has developed a standard for helmets and faceguards for football, baseball/softball helmets and lacrosse helmets which helmet manufacturers, national and state associations have adopted. Its primary purpose is to commission research on, and where feasible, establish standards for athletic equipment.

NOCSAE is not a governing body, and thus can only make recommendations to the various governing bodies and rule makers of a particular sport. A manufacturer affixes the NOCSAE seal to its products and assumes the responsibility for meeting the NOCSAE Standards. NOCSAE is located at, 10111 West 87th Street, Overland Park, KS 66212, (913) 888-1000.