**Locker Rooms Present Major Risk to Safety**

Minnesota Hockey and USAH make a plea to parents to assist in every possible way to ensure that our locker rooms and changing areas are safe. As presented in an earlier article, a major plank of the SafeSport Policy created by USAH, is the Locker Room Monitor Policy, which in short mandates that no players are ever in a locker room or changing area that is not monitored by at least one screened adult.

Although coaches can fill the monitor role, it became clear in the early days of the policy that the coaching duties often made doubling as monitors difficult. It was agreed that teams would seek out gender appropriate parent volunteers to act as monitors, that they would be screened, and available to be scheduled to monitor locker rooms for both practices and games. The evidence this season so far indicates that we have not been diligent in seeing to it that the monitoring of locker rooms is taking place.

Numerous unfortunate incidents have been investigated by SafeSport and have included assaults, injury from horseplay, bullying, and naked images being electronically captured and distributed on the internet due to the lack of presence of an adult in the locker rooms. These occurrences are transcendent to location and age involving many districts, and players from squirts to junior gold. In each case, the leaders of the team, whether coaches, managers, or association administrators were aware of the monitoring requirement, but failed (at least at the time of the incident) to ensure that someone was on duty.

Notwithstanding that many parents are uncomfortable being in locker rooms while players change, it is clear that greatest opportunity and potential for harm to our youth, whether by jocularity or maliciousness, is present in an unmonitored locker room. Consequently, SafeSport makes the plea for parents to take an active role in assisting the team leaders in assuring that the locker rooms and changing areas are monitored…. ALWAYS. Ways to assist in this goal include volunteering to serve as a monitor, verifying that your association has a locker room policy in place, verifying that it has been communicated to the coaches, verifying that someone is on duty for every practice and game, and bringing it to the attention of the association administration, and if necessary SafeSport, if there is a lack of adherence to this important policy.

New rules are inherently difficult to adhere to, but the facts about the abuses taking place in our unsupervised locker rooms are serious and troubling. Everything that can be done to lessen or eliminate these opportunities for harm is critical- cooperation and vigilance from all parents is key. Minnesota Hockey and SafeSport thank you for your help in working to keep all of our participants safe.

**MN Hockey's Lockerroom Monitors Screening**

Minnesota Hockey adopted a background screening policy which took effect at the start of the 1998-99 season to reduce the risk of players becoming victim to sexual or physical abuse. To carry out this policy, coaches, referees, board members, team managers, locker room monitors, and officers of Minnesota Hockey and its affiliates are required to consent to a background check every other year.

To oversee the implementation of this policy, a new standing committee of Minnesota was created - the Screening Committee. In the summer of 2013, the screening policies and procedures were revised to conform with mandates established by USA Hockey as a part of its SafeSport Policy. With the elimination of screening consent "paper" forms, the process of becoming screened has been streamlined and automated by enabling participants to complete online screening forms contained on this website.

We are currently screening 8,000-10,000 coaches, 2,000-3,000 referees and 10,000-12,000 other volunteers.

All of us in Minnesota Hockey should be proud of the success of this program. It has succeeded because local associations get the word out that screening is required. It has succeeded because registrars have made sure that no team is registered without all coaches being screened. It has succeeded because Minnesota Hockey has funded the criminal background searches at a cost of tens of thousands of dollars each year. It has succeeded because the Screening Committee, the Minnesota Hockey President and the Board of Directors have fulfilled their duties in hearing appeals of disqualification and when appropriate, have sustained disqualification under the tough standards set out in this policy.

Minnesota Hockey is committed to not only continue the success of this policy, but to make the hockey community and the public at-large more aware that this organization, because of the concern for the well-being of the kids playing hockey, has committed significant resources and efforts to make hockey free of any criminal element, safer for the participants regardless of age or gender and a shining example of a sport which can and will "clean its own house". For more information on the Minnesota Hockey Screening Policy, please don't hesitate to contact Scott Gray, Screening Committee Chair, at sgray@metrolegal.com.