

Fun in the Sun: Summertime Event Safety Tips



By Rachel Sams

Lead Consultant and Editor

Resource Type: Risk eNews

Topic: Facility, Program and Transportation Safety

One of the most memorable summertime nonprofit events I've attended is the Parade of Playhouses, which supports New Mexico Appleseed, an organization that seeks to address issues related to child poverty in the state.

Design professionals created playhouses that were auctioned off to raise money for New Mexico Appleseed. Event attendees checked out the wildly creative playhouses, which were displayed at the Albuquerque BioPark. Then guests dined on the BioPark's beautiful grounds. The year I attended, the weather was fantastic—cooler than usual for August, maybe in the low 80s.

A summertime nonprofit event can provide lots of magical things: seasonal food, refreshing beverages, sunshine, your community's favorite outdoor traditions (or new traditions), and great company.

Summertime events outdoors also bring many potential hazards. On a different day, the Parade of Playhouses might have faced 100-degree temperatures at 6 p.m. or a full-force monsoon thunderstorm. I would not have stayed to bask in the ambiance in either case.

Extreme weather events, including [major heat waves](#) and [intense air pollution episodes](#), have [increased](#) as [climate change](#) impacts our planet. Your nonprofit should pay extra attention to preparation and safety for any outdoor events you hold this summer and every summer that follows. Here are some key considerations to keep your warm-weather outdoor events safe.

Monitor the weather closely before, during, and after your event. Ideally, choose a venue that offers both indoor and outdoor spaces, and plan to use your venue's indoor spaces if outdoor conditions reach unsafe levels. Determine what conditions will trigger contingency approaches (for example, "At a temperature of 90 degrees or air quality index of 150, we will move operations indoors.") If relocating indoors during your event won't be possible, determine what threshold would prompt you to postpone the event.

Some thresholds you may want to consider for stopping or relocating your event:

- If you [see lightning](#).
- If you hear thunder.
- If the temperature rises above 90 degrees (85 degrees for activities that involve sports or exercise)
- If the air quality index rises above 150

Tailor food and beverage options for warm conditions. Offer as many fruits and vegetables as possible; their [high water](#) content can help hydrate guests. Provide ample water stations with clear signage. Food spoils faster in the heat, so avoid dairy, egg, and mayonnaise-based dishes. Passed or plated options fit a hot-weather event better than a buffet. If you choose to offer a buffet, catering staff will need to monitor temperatures closely. Take it easy on alcohol, which can have a dehydrating effect. You might want to skip offering hard liquor in favor of beer and wine or ask event staff to craft lower-alcohol drinks. Consider offering a festive, fun alcohol-free beverage ([mocktail](#)) that aligns with your theme (e.g., color, ingredients, mocktail name).

Tailor activity options for warm conditions. Dancing or playing sports at an event can be a blast, but intense cardio activity warms the body quickly and can contribute to overheating. You might want to consider cornhole, ping-pong, or yoga instead of soccer or a classical music concert with lots of room to spread out and relax on the grass instead of a rock concert with people crowding the stage.

Keep your event shaded. Trees, tents, and table umbrellas help keep the temperature down. So does holding your event earlier or later in the day. In your pre-event communications with guests, encourage them to wear hats, sunglasses, and sunscreen. Carefully plan your event's layout to make sure any lines (for food, the bar, the auction, etc.) form in the shade. Consider using misting devices to keep guests cool. Provide plenty of seating for guests who may need a break from standing or taking part in activities in the sun.

Prepare for emergencies. Provide a first aid station or medical tent that can address common heat emergencies, such as dehydration or heat exhaustion. Craft an emergency plan for the event and share it with employees and event staff. Consider:

- How will you evacuate if necessary?
- How will you communicate emergency messages to guests?
- Who will handle key tasks in an emergency?

Control crowding. Overcrowding not only increases physical safety risks at an event, it can also increase the likelihood that guests will get overheated. Work with event or security staff to plan for an orderly flow of people and traffic throughout your event and avoid crowding.

Your employees and the people you serve have been through a lot these past few pandemic years. This summer provides great opportunities to relax and celebrate being together. With careful planning and attention to safety, you'll make unforgettable memories—and lessen the likelihood that they include an ambulance ride.

Rachel Sams is a Consultant and Staff Writer at the Nonprofit Risk Management Center. Once, she fainted at a work event, and once, her hair caught fire. She now takes additional precautions to mitigate both of those risks. Reach her with your thoughts and questions about summer nonprofit event safety at rachel@nonprofitrisk.org or (505) 456-4045.