

November 22, 2005

## THE POPULARITY OF "HEELYS" BRINGS A VARIETY OF ROLLER SHOES OUT TO PUBLIC PLACES.

**What Are Roller Shoes?** The latest of fads grabbing the attention of school aged children and young adults are athletic shoes with a wheel insert known as "Heelys" or Roller Shoes. "Heelys" is the brand name but they may also be referred to as "Heelies", "Wheelies" or "Roller Shoes" by some. Roller Shoes allow the rider immediate transition from walking and running to rolling simply by altering their stance. These are high quality street shoes that have a single removable wheel in the heel of each shoe. Roller shoes is the generic term used throughout this alert and suggested for any signage or facility policy.

Several school boards prohibit the use of "Roller Shoes" on school property and advise parents that they are a safety concern for students when used in crowded hallways. The wheels are high performance and not intended for indoor use. Some public buildings and shopping malls are also following suit by prohibiting or limiting their use when worn on the premises.

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**Public Safety Concern** - In a recent letter to the NHL commissioner Gary Bettman, the Canada Safety Council [<http://www.safety-council.org/index.html>] requested that "Roller Shoes" be banned from all NHL games and further suggests that all public buildings should consider such a ban. "If they are not used properly, there is absolutely no question "Heelys" can be unsafe. Children using "Heelys" should wear the same protective equipment worn for skateboarding or in-line skating, such as helmets, elbow pads and knee pads. That said, "Heelys" should not be used in public buildings, or malls and should be banned from being used in school hallways and playgrounds." (Emile Therien, President Canada Safety Council) Read full letter to NHL Commissioner on "Roller Shoe" ban. [<http://www.safety-council.org/news/media/letters/2005/nov9-heelys.html>]

Although there have been no reported incidences or injuries there is a potential for risk in areas where the public gathers. Because "Roller Shoes" are not considered sporting equipment, protective equipment is often an oversight. With the increasing popularity of "Roller Shoes", Facility managers and operators should consider whether these shoes pose a risk to public safety in their facilities. Noticeable wear and tear on surface flooring and specialty courts may also come into play.

The O.R.F.A. supports the restricted use of "Roller Shoes" before any serious injuries occurs or related public concerns. Any policy that can limit exposure to liability should be carefully considered. By treating "Roller Shoes" much like rollerblades or scooters, facility owners can incorporate a similar rule into their facility code of conduct. Remember to inform staff on what "Roller Shoes" are and how to properly handle a situation when it arises.

The following examples have been modified from existing recreation facilities that prohibit "Roller Shoes" and show how the message can be communicated to facility patrons.

*Any town Sports Centres - No in-line skating, skateboarding or roller shoes ("Heelys") are allowed in the common areas of the facilities.*

*Any town Skating Club - Prohibited Activities: Use of in-line skates (other than on designated playing surfaces), skateboards, scooters, and heelies and other rolling devices, as well as, cleats.*

*Outdoor Court Areas: Tennis and paddle tennis courts are for racquet sports only. No roller skates, heelies, roller blades, scooters, skateboards or bicycles are allowed on court surfaces or the surrounding area at any time.*

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**Quick Tip**

- Create the Policy
- Inform Staff
- Put into Practice

**Did You Know...**

**1760** - A London instrument maker and inventor, Joseph Merlin, attended a masquerade party wearing one of his new inventions, metal-wheeled boots. Joseph desiring to make a grand entrance added the pizzazz of rolling in while playing the violin. Lining the huge ballroom was a very expensive wall-length mirror. The fiddling skater stood no chance and Merlin crashed solidly into the mirrored wall, as his roller skates crashed into society.(more about Roller Skate History)

<http://inventors.about.com/library/weekly/aa050997.htm>

**2000** - Roger Adams, inspired by his childhood love of roller-skating, invents "Heely's", the athletic shoes with wheels in the heels that allow the wearer to shift from walking to skating, or "heeling," without changing footwear (MSNBC more about invention of "Heely" brand)

<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/4354874/print/1/displaymode/1098/>

The Ontario Recreation Facilities Association continues to make our members aware of emerging issues that affect Recreation Facilities. This **Facility Alert** should be treated as information only to assist O.R.F.A. members make informed decisions for their operations.

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