

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a fairground at night. In the center, a large Ferris wheel is brightly lit. To the left, there are colorful, illuminated structures, possibly part of a parade float or a fair booth. To the right, another illuminated structure is visible. A crowd of people is walking through the fairground. The sky is dark with some clouds.

ICAP RISK CONTROL

A GUIDE FOR FAIR BOARDS AND
AGRICULTURAL ASSOCIATIONS

2025



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INTRODUCTION

Iowa's fair and agricultural associations are renowned for their vibrant livestock exhibits, diverse food offerings, and dynamic entertainment events. These organizations vary widely in scale—from small fairs that attract a few thousand visitors and primarily focus on livestock shows to large-scale events drawing tens of thousands of attendees while hosting a broad spectrum of attractions, including rodeos, carnivals, car races, alcohol sales, live entertainment, building rentals, and campgrounds.

Whether operated entirely by board members and volunteers or supported by administrative and maintenance staff, these fairs function as self-contained

communities, each presenting a unique set of risks and operational challenges. The facilities, grounds, and associated events create complex exposure points that necessitate proactive risk mitigation strategies to ensure safety, compliance, and long-term sustainability.

Regardless of the size or scope of your fair or agricultural association, this guide serves as a comprehensive resource. It can be utilized in its entirety or referenced selectively to identify and manage risks specific to your organization, helping to safeguard both attendees and operations.

Contact ICAP Risk Control to complete an onsite assessment, discuss best practices to control exposures, and develop a custom plan.

Please be advised that the checklists provided in this guide are intended solely as a reference tool and are not designed to serve as legal advice or to be all-inclusive.

VOLUNTEERS AND EMPLOYEES

Most fair and agriculture associations primarily rely on board members and volunteers. However, it's not uncommon for them to hire full-time, seasonal, and part-time employees as well. From a liability and coverage perspective, the distinction between a volunteer and a paid employee is minimal, and both should be treated similarly.

Proper management of volunteers and employees is crucial, as failure to do so may lead to employment-related claims.

While these guidelines can help with appropriate handling, it is advisable to consult an attorney if there is any uncertainty about the process.



- ☐ Vetting or background checks are conducted for all volunteers. The level of background check depends on the position held and potential interactions with vulnerable populations or individuals.
- ☐ [Standard applications](#) are required to be filled out by paid employees and volunteers that contain veteran's preference status ([Iowa Code 35C](#)).
- ☐ Volunteer waivers are signed as part of the application process.
- ☐ Employee handbooks are in place for those that have full and/or part-time employees.

Check out [Safer Practices for Screening and Selecting Volunteers](#)

VOLUNTEERS AND EMPLOYEES

Applicable policies should include at a minimum:

- ☐ Introduction and non-contractual statement
- ☐ At-will employment
- ☐ Equal Opportunity Statement
- ☐ Harassment/Discrimination Policy
- ☐ Drug/Alcohol/Smoking Policy
- ☐ Code/Rules of Conduct
- ☐ Employee Acknowledgement of Receipt Form

In addition:

- ☐ Written job descriptions are in place for each employment/volunteer position and updated annually.
- ☐ Employee handbooks and job descriptions are reviewed with employees/volunteers at time of hire.
- ☐ Policies applicable to volunteer duties/expectations are in place and reviewed with volunteers at time of duty.
- ☐ A monetary handling policy is in place that includes conducting annual financial audits or when leadership changes occur.

Build an employee handbook at the ICAP [Resource eLibrary HR Portal](#) or reach out to our risk control team for an example template.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Large crowds and outside events can create challenges when it comes to safety and security. A well-prepared emergency plan should be developed, practiced, and reviewed annually.

- ☐ [County EMA](#) has been contacted to assist with the development of emergency planning.
- ☐ Written emergency plans are in place that address fire, severe weather, medical issues, crowd disturbances/active threat, and lost children.
- ☐ Law enforcement and EMS services provide onsite presence and are readily available to respond.
- ☐ Signage is posted around the fairgrounds and in buildings indicating locations of medical services/first aid, safety equipment, evacuation routes, designated severe weather shelters (if applicable), and safe meeting sites for lost children.
- ☐ Methods have been developed and are in place to make whole grounds emergency announcements.
- ☐ A plan is in place to lock the fair down in the event of missing children.



LIVESTOCK & SANITATION

In the context of agricultural fairs, livestock exhibitions and auctions play a pivotal role. Iowa's livestock sector serves as a significant asset, contributing to farmers' income, ensuring food supply, and providing entertainment options for the community. To safeguard the welfare of livestock, handlers, and attendees, the state of Iowa has established comprehensive guidelines that must be adhered to during animal exhibitions at these fairs.

- ☐ [Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship 2025 Health Requirements](#) for The Exhibition of Livestock, Poultry and Birds at State Fair, District Shows, and Exhibitions are followed.
- ☐ Clearly visible Warning signs are posted with the applicable warning messages as stated in [Iowa Code 673.3 and 673.5](#).
- ☐ Tack is not provided to those that exhibit animals. All exhibitors provide their own equipment. (Tack is equipment used to care for animals such as saddles, bridles, reins and other gear.)
- ☐ A Veterinarian should be present at all animal check-ins and be on call during the fair.

SANITATION

Fair and agricultural events carry a higher risk of contracting and spreading diseases due to potential exposure to animals and waste. Providing adequate facilities and practicing good hygiene can significantly reduce the risk of disease transmission.

- ☐ Plumbed restrooms are available and periodically cleaned.
- ☐ Hand sanitizer is available in/around locations serving food.
- ☐ Extra porta-pots and hand washing stations are available.
- ☐ [Signage](#) is posted as a reminder to wash hands.
- ☐ Animal waste sites are designated.
- ☐ Animal waste is removed daily.



FIREWORKS

Fireworks displays are a beloved feature at many fairs and public events. However, it is essential to recognize that, while enjoyable, fireworks pose significant risks, including the potential for serious injuries and property damage if not managed properly. Proper storage, handling, setup, and execution are critical for ensuring safety. Furthermore, compliance with all relevant [state and local regulations](#) is imperative when organizing a fireworks display.

- ☐ Fireworks are set up and displayed by qualified persons evidenced by [documented training](#) and/or certifications.
- ☐ A display area site plan has been developed and submitted to the authority having jurisdiction (e.g. fire chief, local marshal, per requirements of applicable permits).
- ☐ Applicable city/county permits have been obtained to display fireworks.
- ☐ EMS and fire services are on site during fireworks shows.
- ☐ Fireworks are stored and safely secured in areas away from fuel tanks, buildings, and open flames.
- ☐ Smoking is prohibited within 50' of where fireworks are present.



LIVE MUSIC

Numerous fairs and agricultural associations organize live music events, with some featuring prominent headlining acts capable of attracting crowds exceeding 20,000 attendees. Typically, larger performances necessitate expanded stages alongside more intricate electrical and lighting requirements. Regardless of the venue size, factors such as stage design, electrical power needs, the potential for sudden weather changes, and crowd dimensions can pose substantial risks that require careful management and proactive measures.



- ☐ Severe weather and crowd disturbance emergency action plans have been developed, updated, and trained to. (See Emergency Preparedness)
- ☐ Weather is continuously monitored.
- ☐ Electrical supply and connections have been installed/inspected by a qualified electrician.
- ☐ Law enforcement or other security is present.
- ☐ Event stages, equipment, and entertainers are secure from public access.

FOOD SERVING

Attending fairs is often a key attraction for many individuals, with food playing a central role in the experience. The distinctive aromas and flavors typically found at fairs contribute significantly to their appeal. However, the provision of food also introduces the risk of foodborne illnesses due to improper handling or cooking practices.

To mitigate the risk of fires associated with various cooking methods, it is essential to exercise caution when utilizing open flames, fats, oils, and greases. Moreover, electrical systems must be adequately designed to meet the power demands of cooking appliances.

- ☐ 3rd [party food vendors licenses](#) and registrations are displayed for the type of food they will serve.
- ☐ At least one designated individual has been trained as a [Certified Food Protection Manager](#).
- ☐ Restaurants/concessions/food stands are operated under a current health department inspection.
- ☐ Electrical is installed and routinely inspected by a certified electrician.
- ☐ Each cooking device is powered by a dedicated electrical outlet.
- ☐ Grease, oils, and fats used in cooking processes such as with deep frying or using griddles and stove tops are equipped with automatic ventilation and fire suppression systems.
- ☐ K-rated fire extinguishers are present and marked.
- ☐ LP tanks used for cooking are stored away from ignition or impact sources.
- ☐ Larger, upright LP cylinders are secured to prevent tipping over.

ALCOHOL DISTRIBUTION

The provision of alcoholic beverages during fairs and other events is a common practice, enhancing the overall experience by complementing food choices and entertainment. However, it is imperative to exercise significant responsibility in the service of alcohol to mitigate the risks associated with serving individuals under the legal drinking age of 21, as well as to prevent overserving legal-age consumers.

- ☐ Employees/volunteers serving alcohol at beer tents/gardens/concessions follow alcohol distribution and serving laws and are [trained accordingly](#).
- ☐ IDs are checked using law enforcement personnel or trained security that use ID card scanners.
- ☐ Colored wrist bracelets are required to ID those of legal age to consume alcohol.
- ☐ Entrances to areas where alcohol can be consumed are controlled or require adult supervision (beer gardens).
- ☐ Security cameras are utilized to monitor beer garden/bar areas.
- ☐ Alcohol is not allowed in race pit areas.



SPECIAL EVENTS

To enhance patron engagement at fairs and agricultural events, diverse entertainment options are typically offered to appeal to a wide range of interests. These may include live music performances, carnivals, auto races, demolition derbies, tractor pulls, rodeos, sporting events, and fireworks displays.

To mitigate risks associated with these activities, it is advisable to collaborate with experienced promoters who specialize in event management and adhere to established risk transfer protocols.

- ☐ 3rd parties and promoters are required to agree to and sign a contract.
- ☐ Contracts contain hold harmless/indemnification language that favors your organization.
- ☐ Contracts are reviewed by an attorney prior to signing.
- ☐ 3rd parties and promoters provide liability insurance that meets ICAP suggested minimum limits.
- ☐ Liability insurance certificates name your entity additional insured.
- ☐ Participants in special events should sign a waiver.
- ☐ Alcohol is not allowed to be consumed by the participants or pit crew during an event.



BUILDING/GROUND RENTALS

Many fair and agricultural organizations offer rental opportunities for their buildings and grounds for various purposes. This initiative not only provides the community with accessible venues for private events but also generates a valuable revenue stream for fair associations. Rentals may include spaces for weddings, graduation parties, professional meetings, private storage for individuals or businesses, and sporting events.

To ensure safety and minimize liability, it is crucial to adhere to established risk transfer guidelines, including the use of contracts and insurance. Third parties and promoters are required to review and sign a formal contract before utilizing the facilities.

- ☐ Private event insurance is requested, obtained, and verified prior to allowing event to occur. This is especially important for events that introduce outside exposures such as bringing alcohol on site, enlisting 3rd party entertainment, or parties involving large crowds.
- ☐ Private event insurance certificates are confirmed with your local agent or issuing insurer.
- ☐ Rental rules are outlined and provided to those renting spaces.
- ☐ Buildings are cleaned/inspected prior to events.
- ☐ Crowds do not exceed established building occupancy. Your local fire marshal should be contacted to determine occupancy limits.
- ☐ Law enforcement or security is present where alcohol is served.
- ☐ Open flames are not allowed during events.
- ☐ Egress paths and exits are not blocked by tables, exhibits, or other items brought onsite.
- ☐ Emergency and exit sign lighting is available and works.
- ☐ Fire extinguishers are mounted, marked, and inspected annually.
- ☐ Updated lease agreements are in place for extended periods of business or organizational occupancies.
- ☐ LP tanks are removed and batteries disconnected during winter recreational vehicle storage.

BUILDING/GROUND SECURITY

Ensuring the protection of buildings and associated property is crucial during fairs and events, as well as during periods when the grounds may be unoccupied for extended durations. Preventative measures against theft, break-ins, vandalism, and other malicious activities are essential. It is important that third parties acknowledge building security protocols.

- ☐ Volunteers and employees are trained in good security practices.
- ☐ All buildings are securely locked when not occupied.
- ☐ Money is removed from the premises daily or secured in safes/vaults.
- ☐ Alcohol is secured in locked rooms.
- ☐ Entrance keys and passcodes are limited and provided only to authorized individuals.
- ☐ Adequate lighting is present and working on the outside of buildings and throughout the grounds.
- ☐ Vegetation is controlled to allow good outside visibility and other sightlines.
- ☐ Graffiti and other forms of vandalism are addressed within 48 hours.
- ☐ Security cameras are present and in working order.
- ☐ Security camera footage is maintained for at least 30 days.
- ☐ Entrances are gated and locked when grounds are not occupied.
- ☐ Law enforcement periodically patrols the grounds.



BLEACHERS/GRANDSTANDS

Bleachers and grandstands are integral to the seating arrangements at various types of fairs. They enable a larger audience to attend and enjoy events while enhancing visibility through their elevated design. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that the height of many bleachers and grandstands presents significant fall hazards. These risks must be properly managed and addressed to ensure the safety of all spectators.

- ☐ Seating where the footboard, seat, or aisle is 30" or higher is protected by guardrails that comply with the [Consumer Product Safety Commission for Retrofitting Bleachers](#).
- ☐ Seating is periodically inspected before events.
- ☐ Grandstand seating is periodically inspected by an engineer. This is especially important for very old, wood-type grandstand/bleacher seating.
- ☐ ADA seating areas are provided and designated as such or are included in plans for applicable seating upgrades.



ELECTRICAL

Electrical systems are a vital yet often overlooked aspect of safety and functionality, particularly in commercial settings. It is important to note that electrical issues represent the leading cause of commercial fires. County fairs present unique challenges in this regard, as they require additional electrical power to support various activities, including animal exhibits, cooking, food vendors, carnival rides, entertainment, and camping areas.

Many of the buildings used at county fairs are older and may not be equipped with electrical systems that are in optimal condition or compliant with current National Electrical Codes (NEC). This non-compliance can lead to significant power demands during events, resulting in higher risks of electrical failures. Inadequate electrical infrastructure not only increases the likelihood of fires and property damage but also poses risks to the safety of individuals working with or around electrical systems. Ensuring that electrical installations meet modern standards and demands is crucial for minimizing these risks and promoting a safe environment.

- ☐ Electrical is installed and worked on by licensed electricians.
- ☐ A ground-fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) is in place near water sources such as bathrooms, garages, outdoor areas, kitchens, and in basements of applicable buildings.
- ☐ Electrical is periodically inspected during events for condition.
- ☐ Extension cords are used for temporary means of power only (daily use).
- ☐ Extension cords ground prongs are in place.
- ☐ Extension cords length and wiring gage is appropriate for the amperage being used.
- ☐ Electrical panels are free of storage in all directions by 36 inches.
- ☐ Electrical panel knockouts have a designated circuit breaker or covers are in place.
- ☐ Electrical wiring and extension cords are not run through doorways, windows, or walls.
- ☐ Power strips are not used to plug in appliances.
- ☐ Livestock buildings should be included in the buildings that require GFCI's.

CAMPING

Camping facilities and associated amenities at fairgrounds are gaining popularity, and their offerings can vary significantly. Some areas provide primitive camping options with only tent sites and basic access to electricity or water. In contrast, others may feature more advanced amenities, including water hookups, sewer connections, and up to 50-amp electrical service.

Camping may be permitted during fairs and special events or throughout the entire season. Regardless of the type of camping facility, it is essential to maintain a high level of oversight and maintenance to ensure a safe and enjoyable experience for all visitors.



- ☐ Registration is required that contains camping rules and hold harmless/indemnification language.
- ☐ Rules are prominently posted in camping areas.
- ☐ Camp hosts are provided, present, and identifiable.
- ☐ Background checks are completed for camp hosts.
- ☐ Fire rings are provided and located in designated areas.
- ☐ Electrical is inspected annually and maintained by licensed electrician.
- ☐ Campsite electrical pedestals are protected from being backed into.
- ☐ Water is tested annually for sanitation.
- ☐ Alcohol is limited to types and quantities allowed, e.g., no kegs or hard liquor.
- ☐ Quiet hours are established and enforced.
- ☐ Playgrounds meet [Public Playground Safety Standards](#), and are frequently inspected and repaired as needed.
- ☐ A designated individual should be responsible for collecting camp fees.

Please be advised that the checklists provided in this guide are intended solely as a reference tool and are not designed to serve as legal advice or to be all-inclusive.

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a fairground at dusk. In the center, a large Ferris wheel is illuminated. To the left, there is a colorful, ornate structure, possibly a carousel or a game booth, with many lights. To the right, another brightly lit structure is visible. People are walking around the fairground, and the sky is a deep blue with some clouds.

FAIR BOARDS & AGRICULTURAL ASSOCIATIONS GUIDE

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