

Team building activities

Team building activities are those activities carried out for the purpose of building employee morale or cohesiveness, strategic planning, providing incentives and include staff appreciation events. Many employers are not aware that team building activities may be covered by workers' compensation.

Unfortunately, some employees have been seriously injured or killed during these events. When planning team building activities, you should assess and control any health and safety hazards, as you would for any employment activity.

General compensation principles

The nature of the activity is not the determining factor for coverage. What is important is whether you directed the activity, or whether there was an expectation the employee attend. Voluntary activities are not covered.

Given the individual circumstances of each claim, WCB looks at the following factors to determine whether a team building injury is covered:

- Did the injury occur on your premises?
- Was the activity on work time?
- Was the employee paid for the time?
- Was the activity for your benefit?
- Was the employee in that time and place due to employment reasons?
- Did you direct or supervise the activity?
- Was the employee's participation in the activity mandatory or voluntary?
 - Did you encourage participation?
 - Was there an expectation that the employee attend?
 - Was the employee concerned about potential unfavourable treatment for non-attendance?

[See Policy 02-01, Part II (especially Applications 1: Employment Hazards, and 2: Time and Place)].

Scenario 1: Injury while participating in a scavenger hunt

As a way to build staff morale, ABC Manufacturing Company holds a scavenger hunt at Fort Edmonton. Although the employer indicates participation is not mandatory, employees generally feel they need to demonstrate that they are team players and most, if not all, participate in the team building event. One of the account managers, Henry, is stung by a bee and misses two days of work due to a bee sting allergy. Is Henry covered?

Yes. The team building event is covered because all employees are expected to attend. In addition, insect bites are covered as an employment hazard if the worker's employment caused him or her to be in a time and place where he or she was exposed to insects (Policy 02-01, Part II, Application 1: Employment Hazards).

Scenario 2: Injury during strategic planning

The manufacturing company holds an annual retreat in Jasper to set corporate goals for the coming year. Henry is injured when the chair upon which he is sitting in the meeting suddenly collapses. He falls to the floor, suffering a concussion. Is Henry covered?

Yes. The entire account management team is required to attend, and the chair is considered a hazard of the premises.

Scenario 3: Injury during travel from a team building activity

On the way home from the retreat, Henry suffers a neck injury in a motor vehicle accident. Is Henry covered?

Likely, yes. When a team building activity is covered, travel to and from the team building activity is also covered if the activity was off-site. However, regular commuting to and from work is not covered. Adjudicators will consider whether Henry was on a personal deviation from his route home (Policy 02-01, Part II, Application 3: Travel).

Scenario 4: Injury during Corporate Challenge

Henry signs up for lawn bowling at the Corporate Challenge. He breaks two toes when he drops a ball on his foot. Is Henry covered?

No. Participation in the Corporate Challenge is entirely voluntary.

For more information on WCB policies, go to our web site at http://www.wcb.ab.ca/public/policy/policy_development.asp