



Oregon Cheerleading COACHES ASSOCIATION

OCCA AT THE FOREFRONT OF CHEERLEADING SAFETY IN OREGON

The Oregon Cheerleading Coaches Association (OCCA) is aware of the negative and error ridden media attention that safety in cheerleading, and cheerleading as a whole, has been receiving recently. The OCCA would like to release a statement outlining the processes and safety education that is required and offered to our coaches in the state of Oregon.

The OCCA works closely with the Oregon Schools Activity Association (OSAA), the governing body for all high school athletics and activities in the state, to aid in the education of coaches in the area of safety and program management. The OCCA also works with the all-star cheerleading gym owners in the state, and has formed a solid team incorporating all three aspects to assist in increasing knowledge in cheerleading and in cheerleading safety.

For high school teams, the OCCA and the OSAA offer these key elements to help keep high school cheerleaders safe:

- All high school teams are required to follow National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) Spirit Rules.
- All high school coaches at any level (varsity, junior varsity, freshmen, assistants, competitive and non-competitive) are required to attend a yearly NFHS Spirit Rule Interpretation Meeting, known as the OSAA Safety Workshop. This course outlines any new or updated NFHS Spirit Rules as well as a complete overview of the NFHS Spirit Rules. The OCCA creates a DVD every year to highlight those changes and to show common mistakes that coaches should be aware of. Coaches who do not take this yearly workshop by November 1st, will have their teams grounded from stunting and tumbling until the workshop has been taken.
- All Athletic Directors are given at least one free copy of the NFHS Spirit Rule Book for their cheerleading coach. Spirit Rule Books are also offered to purchase at all OSAA Safety Workshops.
- OSAA currently requires all competitive cheerleading coaches to take the NFHS Fundamentals of Coaching Course prior to working with any high school teams. The OCCA has a proposal into the OSAA to make it a requirement for all cheer coaches, regardless of competitive status or not, and they hope to have this proposal pass by the end of this school year (2009).
- High school cheerleading teams are only allowed to compete at OSAA Sanctioned Competitions within the state of Oregon. In order for a competition to be sanctioned, it must follow NFHS rules and guidelines.
- Fines and sanctions are given out to those schools who do not follow NFHS rules at ALL times including, but not limited to, practices, games, competitions, and other performances.
- OCCA has a Technical Coordinator on the OCCA Executive Board. This person is also the designated Spirit Rule Interpreter for the OSAA and works closely with the NFHS. The Technical Coordinator trains our technical judges on a yearly basis, and three technical judges are required at every OSAA Sanctioned Competition. These judges are in charge of making sure all of the routines are legal and safe.
- In competition, teams with drops or falls from stunts and tumbling received deductions from their overall score. This is to encourage safety and perfection before progression.
- The OCCA has a Spotter Coordinator on the Executive Board. Their role is to be sure that the spotters are correctly trained, well qualified, experienced and properly assigned to competitions. A minimum of two spotters are required at every OSAA Sanctioned Competition.

The OCCA continues to work with All-Star teams and safety within their gyms:

- All-Star cheerleading teams in Oregon follow the United States All-Star Federation (USASF) Safety Rules and Levels, and only member gyms are allowed to compete at USASF Sanctioned Competitions. While this is a voluntary membership for gyms in Oregon, most national companies require that gyms be USASF certified in order to compete.
- Coaches can be certified from Levels 1 to 6 and must retest every 3 years at the highest level at which they are certified, in order to keep their credentials and for their teams to continue to compete at national competitions.
- Currently local competitions in Oregon (mostly hosted by high schools or other non-profits) do not require that gyms be USASF certified, but most, if not all, gyms in Oregon are USASF members and rule followers.





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The OCCA offers numerous ways to continue coaches education including:

- Offers NFHS, USASF, American Association of Cheerleading Coaches and Administrators (AACCA), and National Council for Spirit Safety and Education (NCSSE) safety, technical, and management courses throughout the year.
- Currently has in-state trainers for NFHS, USASF, and NCSSE safety, technical, and management courses. The OCCA will soon have four AACCA trainers on board as well.
- Hosts the OCCA Spring Coaches Conference, Fall One-Day Clinics, and the OSAA Safety Workshops. At all these events there are safety courses offered.

The OCCA sends out these calls to action to the media and other reporting officials:

- Complete a safety analysis and report strictly for cheerleaders with proper and current statistics of injuries for high school, all-star, and college teams respectively.
- When reporting on high school safety issues specifically, utilize footage and facts for high school teams, rather than college or all-star teams which both follow different guidelines.
- When reporting on statistics that cover a span of over 25 years, acknowledge that cheerleading participation has increased and reference the ENTIRE statistic within the report it was taken from.
- When referencing specific reports or stories on individuals who have been injured, do research to see if the state, school district, school, or all-star gym are required to follow rules and if the rules are being enforced.
- Require all those reporting on any statistics or speaking on behalf of any related institution to give proof of background and/or credentials.
- Contact the various cheerleading associations, at state and national level, to clarify all that they are doing to promote safety in cheerleading.

The OCCA would like to see a positive report on cheerleading safety in the media. Cheerleading has evolved at an exponential rate over the last twenty years and the number of participants is now estimated at over four million. With the rapid increase in this athletic activity, it is true that some states have fallen behind in governing the safety in cheerleading. But, there are many states that have stepped up to the challenge and have continued a strong commitment for coaches education and the importance of safety in cheerleading. These are the associations and groups that need to be interviewed and reported on. The OCCA urges all media outlets to contact them directly with any questions, concerns, or suggestions about cheerleading safety.

About the OCCA

The Oregon Cheerleading Coaches Association has been an active non-profit coaches association for the last 27 years. As the direct link between cheerleading coaches and the OSAA, the OCCA has a strong impact upon decisions affecting all Oregon cheerleading programs. The primary purpose of the OCCA is to promote and improve cheerleading within the state of Oregon, to offer resources and continuing education to all cheerleading coaches throughout our region, and academic and talent scholarships to college bound cheerleaders.

The OCCA currently has 28 board members which include current high school, all-star, and college coaches, as well as former coaches and past industry professionals. More information about membership and what the OCCA has to offer can be found at their website – www.occa.net

