

Officials fear skaters a hazard to themselves and others

By Nancy Ellis

Outdoor roller skating may not be strictly kid stuff anymore, but UNL skaters are still victimized by the characteristic cut knees or scraped elbows.

Roller skating accidents are not a major problem right now, Dr. Garland Bare, University Health Center director said.

Five skating accidents have been reported since school started and, Bare said, these have been mostly soft tissue injuries like cuts and scrapes. However, he noted the health center has treated one fractured wrist.

One way to avoid such injuries is to learn how to fall, Bare said. He recommended that the skater not stiffen his arms but instead relax and roll to the ground.

An even better way of avoiding skating accidents would be to first learn how to skate, according to Suzi Theis, a Roller Skating Rink Operators Association public relations representative.

Roller skating is commonly thought of as a simple children's activity which requires no instruction. However, Theis said, outdoor roller skating does require some preparation.

SKATING OUTDOORS WITHOUT knowing how to

stop, start, or turn, is like trying to drive a car without instruction, Theis said.

An outdoor skater needs to know how to swerve to avoid hitting people and cars, and Theis said outdoor skating surfaces are often scattered with rocks, holes and sticks.

The best preparation for outdoor skating is to practice on the clean flatter surface of an indoor rink, she said.

"Skating on an indoor rink is one of the safest things you can do," Theis said, "because it's a controlled environment."

One of the most dangerous skating obstacles found outdoors are sticks because they will not scoot out from under the rapidly spinning skate wheels like a rock will, she said. Polyurethane skate wheels spin so rapidly, Theis said, that knowing how to stop is essential, especially when skating down an incline.

If a skater does lose his balance and falls, Theis said, knee pads are the best protection. Helmets and wrist wraps aren't necessary when skating on campus or downtown because the traffic isn't too congested, she said.

Before skating long distances, as from bar to bar downtown, Theis recommended that the skater feel comfort-

able and confident in his skates.

IT'S A GOOD idea to do warm-up exercises before a skating trip, she said, including leg lifts. One exercise that strengthens the lower leg and ankle involves sitting on a table with the rollerskates on and flexing the leg below the knee, she said.

Each roller skate weighs about five pounds, she said, and this helps to strengthen leg muscles.

A common error that is made by skaters is the tendency to use a walking motion while on skates, Theis said. A walking motion pitches the body weight forward and results in the skates sliding out behind you, she said.

Lincoln Police Chief Dean Leitner said roller skaters can be a hazard to pedestrians, particularly downtown where people are coming from stores. The Police Department has received complaints from downtown businessmen and pedestrians, but Leitner said there is no ordinance that prohibits downtown roller skating.

Downtown roller skating will be closely monitored, Leitner said, and if there is an increase in accidents, the department will pursue formulating an ordinance to prohibit downtown skating.

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