
LEGISLATIVE REFERENCE BUREAU MEMORANDUM

TO: ALD. MICHAEL MCGEE, JR.
FROM: TERRI GABRIEL – LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH ANALYST-SR. X8532
SUBJECT: SURVEY - SIGNS OR GUARDRAILS ALONG MUNICIPAL RIVERWALKS
DATE: 20 JULY 2004

This memo is in response for information on what other municipalities do with regard to safety along their pedestrian accessible walkways along their rivers. I called 15 municipalities and received responses from 8 cities: La Crosse, Wisconsin; Stevens Point, Wisconsin; Washington, D.C.; Warren, Pennsylvania; San Antonio, Texas; Santa Rosa, California; Richmond, Virginia; and St. Paul, Minnesota. Attached is a table with the survey results.

Three cities have installed either handrails or guardrails along sections of their riverwalks. Those cities are Washington, D.C., Warren and Santa Rosa. Washington, D.C. and Santa Rosa have handrails along some sections of the rivers to protect pedestrians in areas with steep slopes. In Warren, a guardrail runs along a 7-block segment along the river. The 7-block segment is 40 feet above the river and the guardrail is actually a protective barrier from the 40-foot drop.

Two cities post warning signs at the river informing people of the dangerous conditions of their rivers. Those cities are Santa Rosa and Richmond. In Santa Rosa, the signs warn users of the walkway of the bacteria levels of the creek (i.e., the creek has dangerous levels of contamination). At the river's main access point in Richmond, the signs advise river recreational users to wear life jackets when the river reaches 5 feet or above. The Parks and Recreation Division of the City of Richmond monitors the water level on a daily basis. In sections of the James River, where it is 9 feet or above, the City requires river users, e.g., kayakers, to purchase permits and to verify that the user has the skills to paddle on a Class V river. Class V is the second most difficult level on the international scale of river difficulty. Signs are posted at the main access point stating that users in areas of the river 9 feet or above require permits, life jackets and helmets.

Please note that the City of LaCrosse is considering various proposals to improve the safety of the pedestrian accessible areas along the Mississippi, including signage and guardrails. The City Attorney and the city's insurance carrier are reviewing the proposals in order to prevent undue liability.

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Attachments