

# ***Dog Agility Safety Checklist***

v2

## **RING & SURFACE:**

**ARTIFICIAL TURF** – Check for loose edges, holes, heavy wear. (slipping, tripping)

**OUTDOOR GRASS:** Cut short before trial, holes filled in, tripping hazards covered or marked bright spray paint is great for roots sticking out, if possible watered enough ahead to keep grass from being dried or slick. Watch for surface changes during the trial. (falling, breaking bones, sprains, strains).

**DIRT-** Prepped ahead surface should have just a bit of fluff, often needs some watering and not dug too deep, no big clods of dirt or large rocks. (Too deep of surface is VERY hard on joints for exhibitors and dogs. Too hard a surface can mean a lot of dogs slipping and both handler and dog getting sore because of more impact when running. Very important in dirt to have crew members check for surface changes such as landing and take-off spots, tunnel entries and exits, WEAVE POLES always need attention. I highly suggest to clubs that they have two rakes available to stewards as well as a tamper in each ring. Just raking in weave poles does not make the surface safe for our dogs, they must be tamped in. Especially on Tall to Small days, this problem causes many injuries to small dogs, and also makes them physically difficult to complete them correctly.

**RING-**If you know of a problem area in the ring where your trial is held, make sure they get communicated to the judges BEFORE they design the courses, even lighting issues such as sunlight coming into a covered arena in just one part of the ring can be a big problem. Besides safety, this issue may cause non-qualification because of a dog not seeing obstacles easily like weave poles. But sprinkler heads, tree roots, or uneven ground can all cause course design issues. Most judges would prefer that conditions don't cause issues for dogs and would prefer to proactively take care of this before the course is designed.

**EQUIPMENT INSPECTIONS:** If possible, all equipment should be inspected before the trial by club members. If any repairs are or were made. take into consideration if a dog accidentally hit a repair, say on a jump or something, that it won't slice or poke dog.

**TUNNELS: Tunnels cause MANY injuries, please check!!!**

Things inside: Hanging fabric strings, forgotten jump bar used for carrying, too much debris, projecting support wires, tags should be cut out, water should be sopped out with large towels. Watch for worn material of the tunnel where holes appear, they can catch a toenail in small holes. (Dogs falling, slipping, catching or hitting something in tunnels causes MANY injuries)  
Tunnel fasteners and bags: *Tunnel Huggers* are great for holding tunnels in desired location, but they do NOT not provide enough lateral support for the dogs. Several tunnel bags should be used in conjunction with tunnel huggers. Watch for worn out Velcro on tunnels. BAGS NEED TO BE CONNECTED! (As tunnels stretch they will roll up on the outside tunnel bag, which cause a huge tripping hazard for the dog. Never set single bags behind tunnels.) Tunnel bags should be placed close to opening and exits. Many dogs judge openings of tunnels by the placement of the last bag and will end up running in to the front edge of the tunnel. Strap tie-downs can be very dangerous

for large dogs if the straps dig too deeply in between the tunnel ribs. (A Junior handlers Malinois died in Europe from a protruding strap!) At dirt trial, entrances and exits should be raked and tamped during trial to avoid tripping and possible toe catching on entrances. Securing and stretching tunnels: Tunnel should be *fully stretched out* (if not stretched out the support ribs stick up in the bottom and tunnel bags and support tie-downs project in to tunnel causing tripping) Note: it is popular in Europe and in some USA facilities to totally cover the tunnel in bags because of this concern and this has eliminated a lot of tunnel accidents.) Providing carts or wheel barrows for each ring will encourage help with bagging tunnels. Many people (myself included) cannot carry bags for any distance, but we are fine with short moves of tunnel bags. (UKI requires 1 pair of tunnel bags for every 1 meter of tunnel plus one additional pair.) Tunnels under Contacts: Handles should face the interior especially under contacts, if a dog slips off contact onto tunnel they can catch a foot. Make sure additional bags are placed to protect against dogs hitting legs or ramps and make sure they don't cause a sudden indent into the tunnel. (Dogs bank on tunnels and can hit these hard surfaces from inside tunnel). Dark Tunnels: Especially in certain lighting conditions dogs may not see the bend in dark tunnels, using the dark ones for straight or soft turn tunnels, and lighter ones if there is a tight turn may help many dogs.

**DOGWALKS**: No loose or missing rubber, planks firmly attached, dogwalk doesn't laterally wiggle back and forth, plank ends firmly on ground, planks supported if needed to prevent too much bouncing up and down, if it has wheels check they are locked if needed, some dogwalk bases don't work well on uneven outdoor surfaces, surface will need to be dug out or added to, to prevent motion. (too much motion on the dogwalk can cause dogs to lose their balance and fall off) Watch for inclines, it is possible for the dw to be stable but slanted, which could cause dog to lose balance. Watch for gap in top between boards where dog can catch a toe. (Can fill with piece of PVC or carved to fit piece of pool noodle.) Concern has been voiced for dogwalk ramps that have support structure along the side where a dog's leg could slip through when they fall off. Plastic sheeting cut to fit and secured to these with cable ties can prevent this possibility. (These type ramps are otherwise very good ones as they do not tend to flex and wobble). If cotter pins are used in ramp hinges, make sure the pins as well as the handles are rotated down. If they tend to rotate around add a rubber band. Pool noodles to the rescue for covering any protruding bolts, wing nuts, or wires. Also, a tennis ball can be used to cover some protrusions.

**WEAVE POLES**: The support structure surface should be non-slip and securely attached to surface. No tape on poles. If bolted down ring crew should watch that the bolts don't work loose and stick up (severe pad damage). If on dirt, watch entries and exit for dirt that is scooped out from under supports. (toe damage) Dirt around poles should be regularly raked and tamped down, sometimes even within the same jump height. If on artificial turf, watch for weave bases coming loose and bouncing (toe damage). If this is observed, new base tape should be applied, even if in the middle of a jump height. Check that jump cups are smooth. Flexible jump cup strips preferred or single cup jumps.

**AFRAME**: Watch for gap in top between boards where dog can catch a toe. (Can fill with piece of PVC or carved to fit piece of pool noodle.) Check for loose or missing rubber. On outdoor surfaces check that it does not wobble. Support chains secure and even, not hanging down or in a loop. (Slipping, losing balance, falling, dogs could run into support chains, hurting themselves.)

**SEE-SAW:** No loose or missing rubber. Secured with bags or bolts to prevent bouncing, (Slipping, losing balance, falling.) Turn hinge handle down.

**JUMPS:** No loose, dangling or sharp parts from repairs or jump design. Bars not jammed in.

**TIRE:** Secured to surface when possible. Tire chain should not hang into the tire opening. Height tags should be checked for accuracy, dogs get hurt both from tires to high or LOW!

**TABLE:** Crew AND exhibitors should check table is at correct height, dogs misjudging tables can slam into the side. Also, if coming to a table from a high-speed obstacle such as a straight tunnel or dogwalk it should have extra spacing 21 ft. or more.

**REPAIRS:** All repairs should not be sharp or project out such as bolts onto any place a dog may come in contact with it, even if accidentally. Often duct tape over the repair is a good solution, but is likely the dog will step on it, anti-slip tape should be applied. Pool noodles are also good to cover bolts.

## ***Other Related Safety Discussion:***

### **IT TAKES A VILLAGE!!**

**Judges**-Add one minute to check the course and equipment for safety issues. Let the exhibitors know that All Dogs Matter and listen with consideration to safety concerns. If a dog is hurt investigate it immediately BEFORE the next dog starts to make sure that it is not a problem with equipment, footing, or lighting. Conditions do change as dogs run.

**Course Builders**-When handling the equipment, you see a lot. If you see a possible safety issue, see if you can do something about it. If not make sure others know.

**Club members**-Check equipment carefully before every trial and when unloading and see that problems are taken care of ahead of time. This might be a great time to be a pro-active, caring club and *have an assigned Safety Coordinator* as part of your trial committee! Update equipment a bit at a time. Perhaps post on your website or premium list, positive steps your club has made by providing info about recent equipment updates!

**Exhibitors**-Check the course and equipment if you see an issue speak up. There is power in numbers, see if you can find a few others that have the same concern as you, and then approach the judge or official in a POLITE way. Judges are always under a time pressure, so they might initially be annoyed, but none of them wants to have dogs injured, especially when preventable.

### **Some things to think about:**

Pulling our dogs or refusing to enter certain trials, protects OUR dogs from unsafe conditions. But it usually does nothing for the greater good. Perhaps take the time to find a group of you to voice concerns and present it in a civil way. You may make a difference for safety for everyone, or maybe it will fall on deaf ears, but the more people that take the time to do that, the more likely it is that positive changes will be made.

There is a club that let's their judges know well ahead of time that they would like them to nest their tunnels except the 10' tunnel, but the judge is free to move any other pieces of equipment including contacts and the 10' tunnel. So far, all their judges have had no problem complying with this request. This club puts 7 pairs of bags on 15' tunnels and 9 on 20' tunnels. This seems like a great idea to try, maybe suggest it to your club.

**Additional items that might make things easier for ring crew to help keep things safe:**

A way to move tunnel bags near the tunnels such as a golf cart, a wagon or wheelbarrow. A 6 cubic ft wheelbarrow, capacity 300 lbs. loaded with 3 pairs of bags and a tunnel on top was reported to be easily moved by a 14 yr old girl; A whisk broom, to sweep dirt and debris out of tunnel entries, scissors to cut tags or fabric strings out of tunnels; A little flashlight to look in tunnels, which could also reveal holes in tunnels; Duct tape; Anti-slip tape and/or anti-slip spray; Rakes and tampers for trial on dirt. Inform crew of which club member can locate these items.

**COURSE DESIGN CONCERNS:** Ultimately course design rules and changes are up to the governing body of each venue. But this all starts with concerned exhibitors and judges. Many concerns of course design, were shared with me during the creation of this list. My suggestion is at your local trial, write up with a positive flavor, suggestions for changes. For instance, several people mentioned tight c-shaped tunnels formed with 15 ft tunnels as a safety problem. An appropriate positive change would be to only allow straight and soft curves with these tunnels. List out what are the safety issues concerning it. Many people would not see an issue, and they may have had their own dogs hurt and never realize it. Not everyone has the same perspective, taking the time to explain it both helps more people be on board with that change, and it also help them to understand where you are coming from. My explanation would be, that when dogs come into these tunnels with speed they may hit the tunnel hard because these tunnels require the dog suddenly slow down and turn tight. Also, many toe injuries are caused in these tunnels as the ribbing tends to stick up inside the tunnel, even when properly stretched and bagged. This ribbing is very hard on dog's toes, especially small dogs, and many dogs come home from agility trials with sprains and injuries to toes and toenail beds from tunnel ribbing. I have seen many lightbulb moments about this particular topic, as the listener realizes for the first time this has happened to their own dog. Perhaps take the time at a local trial, or in class to put together a little petition, and then send it to the governing body of the venue. Grass root petitions have changed many things in agility.

Other concerns were: approaches to certain obstacles, especially contacts, because an angled approach can cause dogs to lose their balance and have a nasty fall. Enough spacing between obstacle is also a common concern. There are many dogs with running contacts now and there is special concern for dogwalk to table. A fast, straight approach to a table is always a concern, for if a dog misjudges it, it can be a very hard and scary hit.

The most important dog at every trial is your dog. Everyone there feels the same. ALL DOGS MATTER! Whether it is a high-speed dog or moderate dog, whether a big dog or a tiny dog. Everyone of them matter. It is not ok to let things go because *most* dogs will be ok.

Oh...AND ALL PEOPLE MATTER! 😊 Let's try to keep it safe for each other too! Cheers Barb Davis,

## Safety issues with jump cups and jump weight and rigidity.

Eye safety is the reason to be particularly aware of the jump cups. When jump cup strips came out it was a wonderful thing, as in the old days we had one jump for each height, 4" apart, made of hard plastic or metal. Some builders (like my husband) took the time to put a curve to these cups, and some did not, and many of our dogs would get nicks and cuts near their eyes. When the strips first came out they were aluminum, then hard plastic. A good thing was the evenness of them, with cups every 2 inches, it made it visually easier for the dogs to see the cups, so there were less problems with dogs hitting them than with individual cups. BUT they were hard. Many years ago, clipandgoagility.com came out with Flexible Jump Cup Strips. I personally love these and have used them for years. They are well rounded and have give to them. They also hold up for many years even outdoors, I have had mine over 10 years. (You cannot store them with anything leaning on the strips, or leave bars for a long time out on the very end of the cup, or they will eventually lose their shape.) Many of you have seen my dog Cappuccino, he is extremely fast and has knocked down many jumps, he also slices very tight and I have never had one issue with cuts or injuries from these cups. Many people are advocating for "one cup" style of jumps where you have to move the cup to change heights. The jump has no cup on it except the one holding the bar, so the dog is next to a smooth surface when jumping, unless the bar is displaced. These are common in Europe, but they do not have the frequency of jump height changes that we do in the USA, particularly in AKC. The Galican jumps are one of the best for ease of change, BUT they are a metal jump. Cap has slammed these down several times and I am not that fond of having him hit metal. But with a lot of the plastic jumps, the cups become difficult over time to change as they get used. I personally avoid volunteering to steward with these type of jumps, because when they are hard to get to move they really hurt my arthritic hands and sometimes I can see the judge getting annoyed when I'm pityfully slow!! :) And there are getting to be more of us older types in agility all the time ha ha. Also, no matter which, they definitely take more time to change jump heights than with jump cup strips. AND at many shows I have seen more than one cup left in these type of jumps, and these cups without a bar on them, really stick out and are hard and sharp so it defeats the purpose of having only one cup.

Also, many are advocating that 5-foot bars are the better option for giving the dogs more maneuvering room and less likely to hit their face on the wing or jump cups, and should be required. I suspect perhaps they are optional because of having trials in small arenas where it gets more congested, but I am not sure about that, but I agree it is a good idea.

Anyway, I would love to see clubs change to the Flexible cup strips if they don't have them. They are \$17.95 a pair or less with large orders. A LOT more affordable for clubs to change jump cups than the entire jump. SOME clubs make a lot of money, but some don't, so it could be very unrealistic to have clubs change all their jumps. If clubs are considering new jumps it is smart to think also about the impact of the weight and rigidity on dogs that run into wings. Mark Bills has this video on jump safety, that shows in slow motion exactly these things: <https://youtu.be/2LU9SxAN4r4>.

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