



Athletics Ontario Running Race Sanction Criteria

Updated August 2026

Disclaimer:

Throughout this document, grey text boxes identify recommendations and considerations that are specific to trail running events. These sections provide additional guidance beyond the standard sanction criteria and highlight important operational, safety, and risk management practices that trail race directors should incorporate when planning, organizing, and delivering their events. Trail event organizers are encouraged to review and apply these recommendations in conjunction with all applicable sanctioning requirements.

1. Purpose and Applicability

Receipt of an Athletics Ontario sanction confirms that the race director and organizing committee agree to deliver the event in accordance with Athletics Ontario, Athletics Canada, municipal, traffic-control, safety, and risk-management expectations.

These criteria apply to road running events in Ontario. Trail, snowshoe, hybrid, or multi-surface events may require additional safety review due to differences in terrain, access, rescue, environmental hazards, and navigation.

Once approved, the race will receive an Athletics Ontario sanction logo for the applicable event year. The logo must be displayed on the event website and registration page. The sanction logo is valid only for the approved year and may not be reused for future events without a new approved application.

Failure to follow sanction criteria may affect insurance coverage, future sanction eligibility, and the ability to use the Athletics Ontario sanction logo.

2. Sanction Application and Required Documentation

Race directors must submit all required documentation before sanction approval.

Required documents may include:

- Emergency Action Plan
- Medical Service Plan
- Municipal permits and approvals
- Road Traffic Management Plan
- Communication Plan
- Detailed racecourse map
- Proof of insurance (where applicable)
- Aid station plan
- Volunteer recruitment and training plan
- Start-line layout
- Finish-line and dispersal-zone layout
- Accessibility plan (where applicable)
- Post-race reporting plan

Athletics Ontario may request additional documentation based on race size, course complexity, participant numbers, location, previous safety concerns, or municipal requirements.

New events, events with significant course changes, or events with previous sanction concerns may be subject to enhanced review or audit.

3. Course Design, Measurement, and Signage

Where required, the racecourse must hold a valid course measurement certificate.

Race directors must ensure that:

- The race-day course matches the approved and measured course.
- Any course changes are reviewed before race day.
- Kilometer markers are installed, prominent, and easy to see.
- Turnaround points are clearly marked.
- Split points, where used, are placed accurately.
- Out-and-back sections clearly communicate direction of travel.
- Merge points between different race distances are clearly marked and safely controlled.
- Directional signs and confidence markers are used where participants may be uncertain.

- Course hazards such as potholes, railway tracks, construction areas, narrow sections, or poor surfaces are identified and communicated.

The course must be designed to reduce collisions, bottlenecks, wrong turns, and unsafe interaction between participants, spectators, vehicles, cyclists, and pedestrians.

4. Participant Communication

A clear participant communication plan must be in place before race day.

Race directors must provide participants with:

- Complete event schedule
- An easily understood racecourse map (include kilometer markers) and elevation profile chart with descriptions of main technical features and total positive and/or negative elevation gains.
- Start-line and finish-line locations
- Turnaround points and major turns
- Water, aid, and medical station locations
- Washroom locations
- Bag-check instructions
- List of permitted items and equipment
- Parking and transit information
- Road-closure and access information
- Wave start, corral, and start-time details
- Weather-related safety reminders
- Emergency instructions
- Contact information or information-booth details

Participants and volunteers must be informed of course hazards and environmental conditions before race day.

For trail running events, when providing the regulations and race rules to participants, race directors should clearly communicate the race's specificities, including race distance and elevation gains and losses, types of terrain, specific risks, and degree of self-sufficiency required to complete the race.

Additionally, race directors should clearly state what supplies participants are recommended to have with them during the total duration of the race to prevent accidents, and to enable participants to make their position known in the event of an emergency situation (e.g., cell-phone, headlamp, whistle, spare clothes, drink, food). It is important that race organizers also identify elements that participants must wear at

all times such as their race-bib (it is recommended that race bibs include an emergency phone number for participants).

5. Emergency Action and Medical Response Plan

A written Emergency Action Plan must be in place for every sanctioned race.

The plan must address:

- Medical emergencies
- Severe weather
- Heat, cold, humidity, poor air quality, or wildfire smoke
- Active aggression or security incidents
- Lost participant or missing person procedures
- Evacuation procedures
- Emergency vehicle access points
- Ambulance access routes
- Nearest hospital or emergency receiving facility
- Communication between race command, police, traffic control, medical teams, course captains, aid station captains, and volunteers
- Incident reporting and documentation

**Please note that it is the race director's responsibility to ensure race volunteers are well informed and trained in the procedure to follow in case of a medical emergency.*

Race directors must ensure that:

- A qualified, designated, and clearly identified first-aid or medical provider is present for the duration of the race.
- A Medical Lead or Medical Director is assigned where appropriate.
- Medical personnel are clearly identifiable to participants, volunteers, and staff.
- Medical staff are trained on the Emergency Action Plan.
- AEDs are available or immediately accessible.
- AED locations are known to medical staff, race staff, and key volunteers.
- Medical stations are visible, accessible, properly supplied, and listed on the course map.
- Medical stations are placed based on race distance, participant numbers, course geography, weather, and risk areas.
- Medical transport options are considered for injured participants along the course.

- An ambulance(s) is on standby near the course, in the event that a participant needs to be urgently transported to the hospital.

Exposed wires, electronics, generators, timing equipment, and other technical equipment must be protected from rain, water contact, and trip hazards.

For trail running events, race organizers and medical staff should have off-road vehicles available to access all areas of the course if needed (preferably with a spinal board and medical supplies).

6. Volunteer, Marshal, and Staff Training

Volunteers, marshals, medical staff, security personnel, and key race staff must be briefed before race day.

Training or briefing should include:

- Role-specific responsibilities
- Safe positioning on the course
- Emergency procedures
- Communication method and escalation process
- Who each volunteer reports to
- How to identify and report hazards
- How to respond to participant distress
- Hygiene protocols for hydration and food stations
- Crowd-flow responsibilities
- Restrictions on directing traffic unless authorized
- Use of designated clothing or identification

All volunteers, marshals, medical staff, traffic-control personnel, and security must be clearly identifiable on race day.

Each key area should have a designated lead, such as start-line lead, finish-zone lead, course captain, aid station captain, medical lead, and volunteer coordinator.

7. Traffic Management and Road Closures

A road race using public roads must have a Traffic Management Plan designed to reduce vehicle, cyclist, pedestrian, and runner interaction.

Ontario road races must have a Traffic Management Plan that follows the Ontario Traffic Manual Book 7 for Temporary Conditions.

Race directors must ensure that:

- The runner-occupied lane is free of parked vehicles.
- Runners are given right-of-way priority.
- Road closures have adequate traffic-control devices.
- Traffic-control products are close enough together to prevent vehicle, cyclist, or pedestrian entry into the runner lane.
- Signalized intersections are controlled by police or approved traffic-control personnel.
- Non-signalized intersections have appropriate hard closures, barricades, barrels, signage, and monitoring.
- Vehicles are diverted far enough in advance to avoid direct vehicle-runner interaction.
- Runner lanes are clearly marked with pylons, cones, barricades, barrels, fencing, or other approved devices.
- Shared-road sections include physical separation from live traffic.
- Traffic-control personnel and course marshals are clearly identifiable.
- Emergency vehicle access routes are maintained.
- Road reopening occurs only after runners, volunteers, signage, barricades, and aid station equipment are safely removed.

Volunteer course marshals are not permitted to direct traffic unless specifically authorized. Traffic direction must be performed by paid duty police, certified traffic-control personnel, traffic wardens, special constables, police auxiliaries, or other approved personnel where permitted.

For trail running events, race organizers must ensure there is sufficient parking to accommodate the total number of event registrants and spectators (minimum one space per participant, plus additional spaces for spectators). If paved parking is not available, volunteers should help direct participants on where to park to ensure adequate spacing between vehicles and parking availability for all in attendance.

8. Start-Line Requirements

The start area must support safe participant flow, clear organization, emergency access, and spectator control.

Race directors must ensure that:

- Start corrals are clearly defined and not overcrowded (if applicable).
- Corral entry and exit points are controlled, labelled, and monitored.
- Start waves are clearly signed and staffed (where applicable).
- Public announcements are audible to participants.
- Emergency access is maintained through or around the start area.
- Spectators are separated from participant-only areas.

- Start-line volunteers, marshals, medical staff, and security are present and clearly identifiable.
- Portable washrooms are provided in sufficient numbers based on race size. The following minimum ratios are recommended:
 - Up to 500 participants - 1 toilet per 50 participants (minimum 10 units)
 - 500–2,000 participants - 1 toilet per 60–75 participants (approximately 20–33 units)
 - More than 2,000 participants - 1 toilet per 75–100 participants (with adequate distribution)
- Washroom placement does not create bottlenecks near corrals or the start line.
- Bag check, information booth, medical support, water, and washrooms are clearly signed.
- Discarded clothing or other items do not create trip hazards.
- A sound system capable of distributing PA sound clearly across the start and finish areas.

An information booth or help point should be available at or near the start area.

For trail running events, race directors must ensure that participants have access to at least one sheltered area in the event of bad or severe weather.

9. Course Operations and Runner Oversight

Race directors must ensure that:

- A lead vehicle, lead cyclist, motorcycle, or other lead escort is assigned where appropriate.
- Event staff or mobile personnel monitor the course.
- Mobile staff can communicate with race commands, medical teams, police, and marshals.
- Course marshals are placed at key turns, intersections, merge points, narrow sections, bridges, turnaround points, and high-risk locations.
- Race distances sharing the same course are safely managed.
- Participants are guided clearly through turnarounds, out-and-back sections, split points, and merge points.
- Washrooms are provided along the course where appropriate for longer-distance events.
- Hydration stations are set up at appropriate locations along the course and managed properly (see next section).

Majority of trail races are run on off-road surfaces and include various types of natural terrain (e.g., dirt roads, forest paths, single track footpaths, sand, snow trails, etc.) and natural environments (e.g. forests, hills, plains, etc.). However, sections of paved

surfaces (e.g., asphalt, concrete) are acceptable to reach or link the trails of the course but should be kept to a minimum. Preferably existing roads and trails should be used. The trail course must be marked in such a way that no navigation skills will be required by participants (e.g. marshals, flagging, and signage).

Race organizers are also responsible for taking care of the environment when planning the course, and during/after the race. If the race takes place in a conservation area, race directors should consult with conservation authorities to determine the best plan of action in the event of heavy rain or other weather events that could damage the trails.

10. Monitoring Runners and Drop-outs

Race directors are responsible for implementing procedures that protect the safety and well-being of all participants throughout the event. A comprehensive participant tracking process should be established to ensure that every registered runner who starts the race is accounted for before the event has officially ended.

Event organizers should implement strategically located checkpoints along the course to monitor runner progress. The number and placement of checkpoints should be appropriate for the race distance, with checkpoints generally positioned at intervals of approximately 15 kilometres. Checkpoint volunteers should provide regular status updates to race managers, allowing organizers to monitor participant locations, identify runners remaining on the course, and respond promptly to any safety concerns.

Race Directors should establish and clearly communicate course cut-off times and event completion deadlines. These timelines help ensure that participants complete the course safely before roads are reopened to live traffic or event operations are discontinued. Cut-off times also support effective participant accountability by identifying runners who remain on the course or who have withdrawn from the event, enabling organizers to coordinate appropriate transportation back to the finish area if required.

A procedure for participants who choose to withdraw from the race should be incorporated into the event's operational plan. Participants who are unable or choose not to complete the race should be instructed to notify race officials or designated course personnel as soon as possible. Race Directors should have established protocols for managing withdrawals, including communication procedures between course staff and race management, participant tracking, and transportation arrangements to safely return withdrawn participants to the finish area.

For trail running events, the initial participant checkpoint should be positioned at or nearby the start line to ensure accurate accounting of all participants throughout the duration of the event.

As part of the course closure process, one or more teams, each consisting of a minimum of two individuals, should be assigned to systematically scan the entire course for any remaining participants. Sweep teams should begin at the start line and progress through the course to the finish, while maintaining continuous communication with race management. If a participant requires assistance, the sweep team should remain with the individual until appropriate support arrives and must not leave the participant unattended under any circumstances.

11. Aid and Hydration Stations

A hydration plan must be in place for all sanctioned races.

The hydration plan must consider:

- Race distance
- Time of year
- Expected weather
- Course design
- Participant numbers
- Participant profile
- Access to water
- Location of aid stations
- Volunteer staffing
- Supplies and backup supplies

Minimum guidance:

- For races 10 km and under, hydration should be provided approximately every 2.5 km to 5 km where appropriate.
- For half-marathon and marathon events, hydration should be provided approximately every 3 km to 5 km.
- Electrolyte fluid should be available at appropriate intervals for longer-distance events.
- If hydration stations are limited due to trail access, geography, or environmental constraints, participants must be informed in advance and instructed on self-hydration options.

Race directors must ensure that:

- Hydration stations are shown on the course map.

- Directional signage is placed at least 100 meters before the station where possible.
- Adequate volunteers are assigned, with at least one volunteer per table.
- Volunteers are clearly identifiable.
- Cups and fluids are prepared before runners arrive.
- Tables are spaced at least 2 meters apart where possible.
- Clear approach and exit lanes are provided.
- Aid stations are placed on both sides of the road where necessary to reduce crowding or crossing.
- Cup-disposal bins or collection areas are provided for 100–300 metres after the station.
- Each station has a station captain or lead volunteer.
- Adequate supplies are available, including water, electrolyte, cups, vessels, gloves, hand sanitizer, and other required materials.

Aid station volunteers must be trained on sanitary practices. Cups should be handed from the bottom with an open palm. Volunteers must not place fingers inside the cup or touch the drinking rim. Volunteers must be provided with gloves, hand sanitizer, and soap and water where possible.

For trail running events, due to the variability of terrain and course distances, there are no set requirements from hydration and stations along the course. However, race directors must provide at least one hydration station at both the start and finish line. The number of hydration and aid stations provided should be based on the number of participants and race conditions. Organizers must ensure that the hydration and nutrition support is consistent with the information provided to race participants.

12. Finish and Dispersal Zone

The finish area must allow participants to finish, slow down, receive support, and disperse safely.

Race directors must ensure that:

- The finish line is clearly identified and marked.
- An ambulance or emergency response vehicle is available where appropriate.
- The post-finish runway is long enough for participant slowdown and dispersal.
- The finish chute is appropriate for the size of the race and expected finisher volume.
- Medical staff are positioned just past the finish line.
- A clearly visible medical tent or medical station is located near the finish area.
- Spectators are separated from the finish chute.

- Vehicles, cyclists, pedestrians, or spectators do not interfere with incoming runners.
- Volunteers are positioned past the finish line to direct runners to keep moving.
- Barricades or channeling devices direct finishers toward medals, water, snacks, medical support, washrooms, bag pickup, and exits.
- Security or marshals prevent spectators from entering runner-only areas.
- Security or marshals prevent finished runners from re-entering restricted areas where necessary.
- Water and post-race nourishment stations are adequately staffed and provided within 200 meters of the finish line.
- Drinks and snacks are available for later waves of participants.
- Tents, tables, and service stations support orderly crowd flow.
- Several exit points are available to support dispersal and evacuation.
- A clearly marked family reunification area is provided.
- An information booth or help point is available near the finish area.

The finish zone must be planned as a crowd-management area, not only as a timing point.

13. Weather and Environmental Conditions

Extreme weather conditions and/or sudden changes can create significant risks for participants and spectators (e.g., extreme heat or cold, heavy rain, lightning, high winds, wildfire smoke, extreme fog, snow).

Race directors should regularly check weather information (from a reliable source), before and throughout the duration of the race. Weather forecasts should at least state the following data:

- The forecasted temperature and possible range at different altitudes
- The point of origin of the winds and their strength
- Wind chill
- Humidity
- Duration and amount of precipitation

Race directors should:

1. Inform runners before the start of the race of the forecasted weather conditions so that they may adapt their equipment
 2. Plan contingency routes to bypass areas rendered dangerous by bad weather
 3. Be able to stop the event at any time, safely and efficiently, particularly if extreme weather conditions arise.
-

14. Accessibility and Participant Amenities

Race directors must consider whether wheelchair racers, para-athletes, guide runners, or participants with disabilities are expected.

Where applicable, race directors must ensure that:

- Accessible toilets are provided.
- Start, finish, medical, washroom, bag-check, and information areas are accessible.
- Hydration stations are accessible to wheelchair racers and participants with disabilities.
- Hydration station tables are placed at appropriate height and clear of obstacles where possible.
- Participants with guides can safely access aid stations.
- Course hazards or barriers affecting accessibility are identified and mitigated.
- Any separate start procedures for wheelchair racers or para-athletes are clearly communicated.

Race directors must also ensure that:

- Washrooms are provided near both the start and finish areas.
- Washrooms are provided along the course where appropriate for longer-distance races.
- Washroom locations are shown on the course map.
- Washrooms are clearly signed on site.
- Washroom placement does not block corral entry, start-line flow, finish-line dispersal, emergency access, or participant movement.

15. Post-Race Follow-Up

Race directors must complete required post-race follow-up after the event.

Post-race requirements may include:

- Publishing official results on the event website as soon as possible.
- Submitting official race results to Athletics Ontario where required.
- Reporting any incidents, accidents, medical emergencies, or major safety issues that occurred to Athletics Ontario.
- Sharing the Athletics Ontario Sanctioned Race Participant Feedback Survey with participants, volunteers, and spectators where possible.
- Submitting corrective actions if requested by Athletics Ontario.
- Participating in a post-event review if the event was audited by Athletics Ontario or if safety concerns were identified.

Any significant incident or near miss should be documented and used to improve future race planning.

16. Compliance and Future Sanction Eligibility

Athletics Ontario may withhold, suspend, revoke, or deny sanction approval where an event does not meet required criteria or where unresolved safety concerns remain.

Events that fail to meet sanction criteria may be required to submit a corrective action plan before future sanction approval. Corrective actions may include updated plans, additional staffing, improved traffic-control measures, external safety consultation, revised course design, stronger medical coverage, improved volunteer training, or other measures required by Athletics Ontario.

Repeated non-compliance may make an event ineligible for future sanctioning at the discretion of Athletics Ontario.

Race directors are responsible for reading, understanding, and applying Athletics Ontario sanction criteria and the Athletics Canada Race Director Guide.

For questions, race directors should contact Athletics Ontario Road & Trail staff at: roadtrail@athleticsontario.ca.

[Microsoft Word - Security Guidelines ITRA EN.docx](#)