USA Rugby's general email last week notifying clubs and rugby organizations of new details with regard to sanctioning tournaments caught many unawares, and upset even more.

The sanctioning program is designed to ensure that all players in tournaments are properly registered with USA Rugby in order for the National Governing Body's liability insurance to cover the event. Tournament organizers were very concerned that some of the requirements might make it impossible to field a tournament team, or to run a tournament.

RUGBYMag.com checked in with Jen Cope at USA Rugby and discussed several concerns, including:

Is this a move by USA Rugby to make sure clubs register all players with the organization, thus making sure the over $3 million in membership dues the organization collects each year keeps coming in?

Are the rules set forth on USA Rugby's website (www.usarugby.org) set in stone, or subject to interpretation based on circumstances? (
Click here for tournament sanctioning page
)

Can you form a motley team for a tournament and not have to register that team as a club with USA Rugby?

Can a foreign team attend a sanctioned tournament in the USA without CIPPing their players and team? (To CIPP means to register with USA Rugby using the Club & Individual Participation Program.)

Are the medical and safety guidelines actually guidelines or regulations?

And finally - Is USA Rugby really requiring tournament only be held on grass fields?

We got answers on all of these.

The last question first. USA Rugby's Safety Guidelines appear to have been mistakenly published without reference to artificial turf. This has been corrected. If you see the Safety

Guidelines here
, you will see they include a reference to IRB Regulation 22 Certified turf.

More answers:
Why is the sanctioning program being pushed now, with what appear to be new regulations attached?

"The initiative to implement the sanctioning process was both a recommendation by our insurance providers AND an effort to bring our organization more in line with many other national governing bodies for various sports," said Cope. "We wanted to ensure that we could cover players during rugby activities outside of regular season practices and games. To do so we needed to present a clear way for tournament organizers to understand and implement basic tournament operation standards, such as field, medical and safety guidelines. Many, many tournaments are already adhering to these guidelines that we've had in place for years — we've just created a clear pathway and process for teams to ensure they are protecting themselves and tournament participants."

How set in stone are these regulations? We asked Cope about several – the regulation regarding playing surface, the regulation requiring an on-site ambulance at all tournaments of six teams or more (an expense of thousands of dollars many tournaments could not afford), and the regulations on ice (minimum 12.5 lbs per team per day), medical staff and medical equipment, and a field monitor.

"We are *recommending* that playing surfaces be grass or Reg 22 certified turf. However, we do understand this can't always be achieved, which is why these safety guidelines will serve as recommendations for tournament organizers," said Cope. "We are trying to raise the bar and set a standard for all tournaments to work towards. Based upon tournament size, level of play and participant numbers, necessary medical coverage will vary. This is another instance in which we will discuss each tournament's needs during their application process and work with them to ensure the appropriate level of medical staffing for their specific event. Having an emergency action plan, available medical staff, and appropriate medical supplies are standards we hope all tournaments can attain.

"Again, these are guidelines and we want to find the appropriate level of medical staffing for their tournament size to ensure player welfare. Having an ambulance on-site for tournaments with 6 teams or more should give tournament organizers a starting point to determine what their medical staffing needs will be."

(Emphasis USA Rugby's.)

One regulation garnered special notice – the need to submit full rosters of all teams four weeks in advance. As many tournament directors know, that request is essentially impossible to comply with. Cope said USA Rugby recognizes these issues:

"We understand that at many tournaments teams are being added less than four weeks prior to the day of the tournament. Our intent is to make sure that all players and coaches who are participating are registered. Tournament organizers are responsible for submitting a list of participating teams 4 weeks prior to the event date. It is the tournament organizer's responsibility to ensure that all coaches and players are actively registered with USA Rugby on the day of the event."

Tournaments are asked to notify USA Rugby of any changes in teams prior to the four-week deadline, and then "USA Rugby ***may*** request a list of match day rosters after the event date to verify compliance."

(Emphasis ours.)

What constitutes a "tournament"?

"A sporting competition where contestants pay a fee to play a series of games on a single day or weekend, to determine an overall winner. These competitions fall outside of regular season games and practices," said Cope.

This then implies that a tournament requiring sanction does not include things like preseason jamborees, or any preseason get-together that has no fee.

"These types of events may fall outside our definition of a tournament, however our policy remains that all participants must be active and registered with USA Rugby to receive coverage," explained Cope.

Foreign teams do not have to CIPP to play in the USA, said Cope.

"No, they don't need to CIPP registered, but they must go through our membership department

for a ‘permission to tour’ application which provides acknowledgment from their host union and as such, foreign players are permitted to play but not covered under USAR’s insurance.”

What about teams assembled specifically for a tournament, such as an Old Boys team, or just a conglomeration of players?

“Players may assemble for a single tournament, but all players and coaches must be registered and active with USA Rugby,” said Cope.

USA Rugby’s requirement that the NGB provide **proof of insurance** to venue owners is not new – many municipalities and other organizations have been requiring proof of insurance for years. Some years ago the caveat that a club be in good standing was enforced by USA Rugby. This can create a chicken-and-egg issue, whereby, for example, a relatively small high school club might have only ten returning players to CIPP, but would need 15 to be in good standing to get proof of insurance.

However, they would not be able to get those extra players until they had a place to practice, which would require that proof of insurance.

Usually clubs can get around this by associating with a larger club and using their facility, or contacting USA Rugby and discussing the issue.

This seems to be the crux of Cope’s statements – contact USA Rugby and discuss your circumstances at sanctions@usarugby.org .

In addition, tell USA Rugby if you see contradictions or mistakes in their documentation.

What USA Rugby needs to do is clarify what is a requirement, and what is simply a recommendation. At present, Cope’s comments indicate the entirety of the Safety Guidelines are recommendations. However, USA Rugby’s own USA Rugby Event Sanction Agreement says differently:

Event Administration: *Local Organizing Group/Club agrees, covenants, warrants and represents that Local Organizing Group/Club* ***shall****:*

A. ***Ensure*** *that the Event* ***complies*** *with* ***all*** *of USA Rugby's safety requirements and guidelines, rules, regulations, policies, directives, decisions and all procedures set forth by USA Rugby are in effect at the time of the Event.*

(Emphasis ours and placed therein to indicate there seems to be no wiggle room in the legal document tournaments have to sign.)

And please note this part of the Sanction Agreement:

Indemnification: *Local Organizing Group/Clubs and the entities responsible for the promotion or administration of the Event, hereby, jointly and severally, indemnifies and agrees to defend and hold harmless USA Rugby, its Associations, Sport Disciplines and Divisions, and each of their respective officers, directors, employees, volunteers and agents (collectively, the "USA Rugby parties") for and against any and all claims, liabilities, demands, obligations, damages, costs of litigation, attorney's fees or other expenses related to or arising out of the organization or conduct of an Event that does* ***not*** *meet the minimum sanctioning requirements outlined in this Agreement. Local Organizing Group/Club HEREBY WAIVES, RELEASES, AND FOREVER DISCHARGES USA Rugby Parties from any and all claims, causes of action, damages and losses arising out of the Local*

This opens up an area of ambiguity as to whether a tournament that doesn't follow the letter of the safety guidelines is covered under USA Rugby's insurance.