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Reap the benefits and avoid the pitfalls of cyber connections

In the past, relationships were lived intensely for the weeks or months while camp lasted but largely packed away with swimsuits and sleeping bags come August. Today, social media has turned “camp” into a year-round event. Campers, counselors and staff can connect through Facebook, websites, email and cellphones — powerful tools that cement friendships and drive return visits to your camp. But social media can also have a darker side. The same channels that let people build and strengthen relationships can also be used to harass and embarrass year-round.

Here’s how your camp can harness the positive aspects of cyber connections while minimizing the negatives.

Put all policies in writing

Have a written code of conduct for campers, counselors and staff that applies to actions at camp and outside its boundaries and includes online/cellphone activities. Your policies should include both behaviors that won’t be tolerated and the consequences if they occur.

“We have strong written policies about bullying, harassment, hazing, drinking and drugs, etc., and they apply both during the season and after,” said Stephen Wallace, resident camp director, director of counseling and counselor training at Cape Cod Sea Camps in Brewster, Mass., and author of *Reality Gap: Alcohol, Drugs, and Sex—What Parents Don’t Know and Teens Aren’t Telling*.

Craft employment policies with cyber issues in mind

Be proactive when developing your policies and recognize that the changing face of technology makes the law a moving target. “Consult with technology specialists and legal counsel and keep local laws in mind,” said Lisa Daley, J.D., a former practicing attorney who now collaborates with Respect U, an anti-bullying resource. “Spell out when a staffer is in your employ and not and make it very clear during the hiring process what will and won’t be tolerated and what activities could have legal consequences. This is your best line of defense.”

Require signed contracts

“You’ll never be completely able to control people’s use of social

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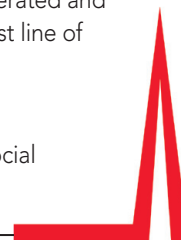
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media, but having camp families and staff sign contracts regarding your policies shows a layer of care and concern," said Joel Haber, M.D., a clinical psychologist and internationally recognized bully prevention and parenting expert. "It shows you're doing the best you can to monitor what's going on."

Empower kids to make good choices

"Role modeling is huge," Haber said. "Kids look up to the counselors and try to be like them, so you've got to impress this on your staff — both in their actions at camp and in what they're sharing online."

"We have a 'good sport award' that kids get for living in our community in a way that's respectful and honest," said Jon Vance, associate director of Camp Sea Gull/Camp Seafarer in Arapahoe, N.C. "We try to communicate that this extends to things that happen once they leave camp too."

Help kids see the long-term impact

Young brains have a hard time processing the idea that once something hits the Web or a cellphone, it's completely out of their hands and has a long life of its own. "They don't think about the long-term consequences — the fact that something stupid they did as a teenager might affect their ability to get into college or get a job," Haber said.

"Get kids thinking about the impact of their actions," Daley said. "Play the 'what if' game. What if I post an embarrassing picture of my bunkmate? What if I send mean emails? Can I deal with the consequences if someone hurts themselves because of me? What if I can't come back to camp because of this?"

Partner with parents

"Parents are anxious about their children's safety," Haber said. "Show them you have layers of protection and layers of staff and that you know how to look after their child."

"I'm a big believer in creating intentional partnerships with parents," Wallace said. "I use weekly emails to let them know what's going on at camp and encourage them to stay in touch with us."

Strongly communicate your desire to hear about any problems — off-season included. "We had campers who formed an online group after they left camp to talk negatively about another camper," Vance said. "We were immediately in touch with the parents, and the group was disbanded that night."

Limit technology at camp

"Banning access to technology is the safest route," Daley said. "Kids need to feel safe being on their own and trying new things. If a camper has to worry that a bunkmate is putting embarrassing videos on YouTube, you've compromised the environment you're trying to create."

If a "no-technology" policy isn't a good fit, access should be extremely controlled. Computers should only be used in a

public place and with constant monitoring.

Cape Cod Sea Camps took a slightly different view and is currently "test driving" limited cellphone use — phones are handed over to staff upon arrival, but teen campers (ages 14-17) are allowed to use the phones on camp-sponsored trips and for one hour a week.

"We didn't have widespread support for our no cellphone policy," Wallace said. "Parents want to keep in touch, and kids were bringing phones to camp with their parents' awareness and consent."

Create a multilayer cyber presence

Cape Cod Sea Camps uses a variety of channels, including a blog, camp Facebook page, individual pages for all camp directors, alumni page and staff page. "Having all these options makes it more likely a camper or counselor will use our resources — instead of setting up their own — and it makes it easier for us to monitor what's going on," Wallace said.

Decide whether you'll limit camper/staff contact

You can walk a fine line when it comes to individual contact between campers and counselors/staff after the season. These contacts can be an excellent way to form long-term relationships that drive repeat visits to your camp and, in the best cases, serve as mentoring opportunities for young campers. But they can also open the door to problems.

"We ask staff only to contact campers with the parents' knowledge and approval and to make sure all of their actions conform to our code of conduct," Wallace said.

"Just as certain counselors work well with different age groups, certain counselors will 'get' how to connect with campers outside of the camp environment, and others won't have that good judgment," Haber said. "Know which counselors are in touch with kids outside of the season and try to monitor that."

"We strongly discourage counselors from friending campers (on Facebook) and vice versa," Vance said. "A college-age counselor is likely to have content on their wall that campers shouldn't see, and as much as they think things are private, they never are."

Dealing with illegal activities

What should you do when online/cellphone activity crosses the line from objectionable to illegal? For example, a situation where an adult counselor or staff member sends sexually suggestive photographs or messages through texts or email to a minor camper? "If a minor is involved, these acts will be automatically considered illegal because of child pornography laws," Daley said. "If the camp learns of this type of activity, it must be reported to the families, and you should consult with legal counsel. The staff member is faced with the real possibility of criminal prosecution, though if they're no longer employed by the camp and the activity occurred after their employ, it's unlikely that the camp can be held liable."



Managing Your Risks

Fire suppression systems need proper maintenance

Church Mutual's risk control representatives are often asked about suggested maintenance practices for sprinkler systems. Also, we get questions concerning the frequency of inspections for kitchen exhaust hoods that have fire suppression systems installed within them.

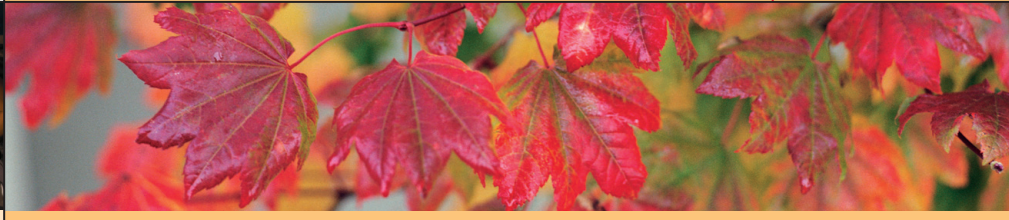
Keeping fire suppression systems in proper working order requires routine maintenance. The recommended work practices we suggest to our customers include the following:

- Wet pipe sprinkler systems — have all automatic systems tested annually by qualified personnel. Keep records of the inspections and tag the system to show the most recent inspection date. Inspect all systems annually prior to the onset of freezing weather. These inspections should be done to verify that windows, skylights, doors, ventilators, other openings and closures, blind spaces, unused attics, stair towers, roof houses and low spaces under buildings do not expose water filled sprinkler piping to freezing conditions. Also verify that adequate heat (minimum of 40 degrees Fahrenheit) is available.
- Dry pipe sprinkler systems — have all automatic systems tested annually by qualified personnel. Keep records of inspections and tag the system to show the most recent inspection date.

Have the automatic fire extinguishing system that protects kitchen cooking equipment inspected and serviced semiannually by a properly trained and qualified vendor to ensure the system is fully charged and in proper operation. Fusible links (including on fire damper assemblies) should be replaced annually or more frequently if required by the manufacturer or local codes.

One last related point. Have your fire extinguishers serviced annually by a qualified vendor to ensure proper operation of all extinguishers in the event of a fire emergency. Each fire extinguisher should have a tag or label securely attached that indicates the month and year the maintenance was performed and identifies the person who performed the service.

Edward A. Steele
Risk Control Manager



Seasonal Spotlight

Fall

Leave tree pruning to the professionals

If you have a roof that's overhung with branches or needs some "minor" tree pruning, it can be tempting to put your maintenance staff or volunteers on the job. Here are four critical reasons why you shouldn't:

1. Personal safety

"It's better for untrained people to keep their feet on the ground," said Rod Boley, certified arborist and president of Boley Tree and Landscape Care Inc. in Middleton, Wis. "Certified arborists understand the challenges that tree pruning and removal present, and they have the experience and equipment to safely handle every task."

2. Tree health

Improper pruning can compromise your trees' long-term health. "People who don't know what they're doing might cut off a limb, when they were better off removing small ones, or create a jagged wound, which often leads to decay," Boley said. "There are a lot of subtle things that the average person doesn't know."

A certified arborist will also be able to treat disease and insect infestations and will know if you're past the pruning state.

3. Building protection

This happens on two levels — during the removal process and long term.

During removal, a certified arborist will know how to remove branches and trees without damaging your buildings. And they'll prune to promote airflow and access to sunlight. "Tree limbs should be pruned away from a building by at least 6 feet, and you should be able to walk around your buildings without hitting your head," Boley said. "Otherwise, you increase the risk of damage during a storm, and you create an environment where mold and mildew are more likely to be a problem."

4. Exposure to electrical lines

Removing branches and trees near "live" electrical lines is dangerous work and should only be conducted by trained professionals.

Ask the right questions

Before you hire an arborist, ask the following questions:

- *Are the people who are pruning/removing my trees certified arborists, and what kind of ongoing training do you require of your employees?* This certification is granted on an individual, not companywide, basis and requires years of training and on-the-job experience, plus continuing education.
- *When do you recommend pruning my trees?* It's best to prune most trees when they're dormant; spring is typically the least desirable time.
- *How much insurance do you carry?* Hiring a tree removal contractor who has limited or no insurance coverage could cause a financial loss to your organization in the event of a costly property or personal injury accident.

Q | A

A Perspective

As your camp prepares its buildings for

another blast from Old Man Winter,

thorough sprinkler system maintenance

is essential. Matt Klaus,

senior fire protection

engineer at the National

Fire Protection Associa-

tion (NFPA) in Quincy, Mass., discusses

important steps to take before the tempera-

ture drops and to help ensure year-round

sprinkler safety.



Risk Reporter: Briefly describe the three types of systems: chemical, wet and dry.

Matt Klaus: Chemical systems are typically used to suppress a fire involving a flammable liquid. They're more common in an industrial setting, and in a camp, the only place you're likely to find them would be in a commercial kitchen area. A wet system has water in the pipes year-round and must be maintained at 40° F or higher, while a dry system can be used in colder temperatures. A dry system still uses water to put out a fire, but the water is stored elsewhere in a heated area. On a day-to-day basis, dry systems are filled with compressed air. If a sprinkler head is exposed to temperatures that exceed the activation temperature — which would suggest the presence of fire — the system expels the air from the pipe, a valve opens and water enters the system.

RR: Having water freeze in the system is a big concern for most camps.

What recommendations do you have for avoiding this problem?

MK: To avoid dipping below 40° F, you can use insulation, heat tracing (a heated cable) or antifreeze in the pipes. If you can't ensure this temperature, you need to have a dry system.

RR: Outside of system maintenance, what are some other important ways to ensure the safety of your sprinkler system?

MK: Obstruction is a big issue. All stored items should be at least 18 inches below sprinkler heads. One solution to maintain proper storage heights is painting a red line on the wall to mark the height you shouldn't exceed. Don't hang things from the pipes or sprinkler heads and know that even a slight bump to a sprinkler head can make it less effective. The head is designed to sit with the deflector parallel to the floor, and if it's not, you're changing the discharge and activation characteristics. During building maintenance, always cover the sprinkler heads, and if you get something on them — like paint — don't clean it off yourself. Any chemical agent can affect the head's efficiency, and you'll want to call in a maintenance expert to handle the cleanup.

RR: What have you found to be the biggest problem when it comes to sprinkler systems?

MK: Closed valves. When there's a fire and the sprinklers didn't activate, it's often because valves were closed during maintenance and never turned back on. Many facility managers and maintenance crews tag closed valves to help ensure they're turned back on, and they follow a checklist for every task.

RR: Who should handle the maintenance of a sprinkler system?

MK: NFPA 25 (NFPA's Standard for Inspection, Testing and Maintenance [ITM] of Water-Based Fire Protection Systems) states that any ITM should be carried out by a "qualified" individual. NFPA defines this as someone who's met the requirements and training standards of the local AHJ (authority having jurisdiction), which is typically the fire marshal.

Resources:

To review more information about NFPA 25, the Standard for Inspection, Testing and Maintenance of Water-Based Fire Protection Systems, go to www.nfpa.org.