

# risk reporter

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## Emergency shelter means more than opening doors

Hurricanes, floods, tornadoes and other disasters inspire many religious organizations to take on the tremendous role of providing temporary shelter for their members and individuals within the community. Although these actions are noble, congregations need to put serious thought and planning into any type of shelter considerations.

### Assess available resources

"Religious organizations should take a careful look at the physical and volunteer resources available to them prior to committing to provide temporary shelter," said Dianne Wilkinson, shelter coordinator for Trinity United Methodist in Ruston, La. Wilkinson managed Trinity's emergency shelter that housed 250 people following Hurricane Katrina.

"A strong volunteer base and adequate facilities, such as gender-specific bathrooms, showers, sleeping space and a kitchen, are very basic shelter necessities," Wilkinson said.

"Congregations also need to contemplate logistical considerations, such as who will be responsible for housekeeping, how will the shelter respond to medical needs and what type of security will be required," said Dewitt Campbell III, MSW, emergency disaster services director for the Salvation Army Midland Division in St. Louis, Miss.

The Salvation Army and American Red Cross offer training and assistance to congregations with emergency shelter plans.

"Overall, organization is key," Wilkinson said. "Designate a group of volunteers who will direct all shelter activities and provide training for the shelter team."

### Develop an emergency supply kit

An emergency shelter might be in operation for a few days or even weeks. In any case, it is important to have a well-stocked supply kit prepared for the shelter. Essential kit items include:

- Extra clothing — appropriate for the climate and season
- Water — at least three days' worth; plan for one gallon of water for every person each day
- Flashlights with extra batteries
- Cell phone — with text message capability
- Battery-powered or hand-crank radio

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## ( emergency shelters )

- NOAA Weather Radio
- First-aid kit
- Food — at least a three-day supply that does not require refrigeration, preparation or water

Store the supply kit in a cool, dry location. Date the kit and update all supplies every six months.

### Establish shelter guidelines

Once an organization has committed to providing emergency shelter facilities, develop a strict set of guidelines to provide structure for both volunteers and evacuees.

"At Trinity, we developed a formal shelter manual with guidelines specific to the different areas of the shelter including residents, sanitation, registration, meals, supply room and hospitality," Wilkinson said.

#### Residents

"Guidelines for shelter residents help establish organization and clear rules," Campbell said.

Outline a daily schedule with specific meal, worship and "lights out" times. Designate areas and rooms of the facility to handle activities, such as sleeping, eating, men's and women's showers and restrooms, changing stations for young children, game room, nurse station and supply room.

General resident guidelines also might include:

- No pets allowed.
- No foul language, drugs, alcohol or weapons allowed on the premises at any time.
- Children 12 and under must be with a parent or guardian.
- The shelter is not responsible for valuables.

In addition, the shelter should outline policies for visitors and smoking.

#### Sleeping areas

Gymnasiums and other large open areas function well as sleeping facilities. Keep a supply of clean sheets, pillows, blankets and towels to meet the capacity needs of the room.

"A general guideline for determining capacity is to allow about 50 square feet per adult," Wilkinson said.

Also consider what types of laundry facilities will be required to provide clean linens and towels for all residents.

#### Hospitality rooms

"One key to the success of our shelter was the hospitality we provided to our residents," Wilkinson said. "We were able to offer a youth activities room along with 24-hour snack and television rooms."

#### Sanitation

With a large number of volunteers and evacuees living in close quarters, sanitation and cleanliness are extremely important to help reduce the spread of disease and maintain

a healthy environment. Oftentimes, the sanitation job is too great for regular maintenance staff.

"In addition to the cleaning provided by the facility maintenance staff, we recommend enlisting the help of night shift volunteers to provide additional sanitation support in heavily used areas, such as restrooms and eating areas," Wilkinson said.

Provide a document that outlines cleaning duties for night shift volunteers. Include where to locate cleaning supplies. List areas to be cleaned and specific cleaning tasks.

"It also is important to have a plan in place to deal with the increase in trash," Campbell said.

#### Registration

A registration desk is a crucial part of a functioning shelter. Provide plans for efficiently checking evacuees in and out of the shelter.

"All new residents should be registered upon arrival," Wilkinson said. "Volunteers should record contact information and direct new evacuees to the nurse station for an evaluation before receiving supplies."

"Be careful when accepting injured evacuees into the shelter," Campbell said. "If necessary, contact emergency services so that those in need can receive the best health care possible."

Upon checkout, try to record where the evacuee is going.

### Establish shelter safety and security

Keeping members, residents and congregation facilities safe and secure should be a priority for the emergency shelter.

"Shelter staff will be the front lines for preventing and addressing problems," Campbell said. "Establish a safety protocol and train all volunteers on how to address and report safety or security issues."

"We had men from our congregation volunteer in four-hour shifts to walk the shelter areas," Wilkinson said. "We also enlisted assistance from the local law enforcement office."

"Keep residents in designated shelter areas. Strategically place staff or lock areas, such as offices, that should remain off limits," Campbell said.

It also is important to have trained medical staff at the shelter.

"We had a nurse on duty 24 hours a day," Wilkinson said. "We also had doctors within our congregation who made rounds to visit residents each morning and were available to be contacted by the nurse or other staff if needed."

In addition, provide first-aid training for all shelter volunteers.

"Keep first-aid kits in all areas of the shelter and restock them as needed," Campbell said. "Do not administer any medicine to shelter residents."

- **For more information** about emergency shelter planning, including a complete disaster supply kit list, visit [www.churchmutual.com](http://www.churchmutual.com), click on "Safety Resources" and select "Risk Alerts."





## Managing Your Risks

### Ladder safety

Trimming trees, repairing roofs, and painting are tasks that have something unfortunate in common — injuries from falls. Each year, almost 100 employees and many more volunteers at religious organizations are injured from falls from ladders.

Recently, a volunteer was using an extension ladder to paint trim. He was about 18 feet up when the feet of the ladder started to slip out. He sustained numerous broken bones and nerve damage in the fall.

Last summer, a custodian was hanging decorations and decided to stretch to reach the next hook instead of moving the ladder. The ladder twisted, and he fell about 14 feet, injuring his ankle, leg and arm.

The most common causes of falls are:

- Standing on the top rung
- Placing the ladder on uneven ground
- Leaning too far to the side of the ladder while working
- Attempting to carry too many items or items that are too heavy up the ladder
- Using the wrong ladder for the job
- Leaning the ladder against the building at the wrong angle

Using a ladder properly and safely takes a little more time, but it's certainly worth it. The first step is selecting the ladder with the correct load capacity. Ladders are rated from 200-pound capacity to 375-pound capacity. Remember to factor in tools and other equipment in addition to your weight.

Other guidelines include:

- The top of the ladder should extend at least three feet over the roofline or working surface
- Always face the ladder
- Carry tools and other materials in a tool belt or use a rope to raise and lower them
- Never use a stepladder as an extension ladder

As the weather continues to improve this spring, maintenance staff and volunteers at religious organizations will head outdoors to tackle new projects. Before that first ladder is hauled out of the garage, shed or basement, take some time to review our safety tips.

Go to [www.churchmutual.com](http://www.churchmutual.com), click on "Safety Resources," "Risk Alerts," and select "Ladder Safety."

**Richard J. Schaber, CPCU**  
Risk Control Manager



# seasonal spotlight

### Protecting property with sprinkler system maintenance

Each year, fire poses one of the greatest threats to places of worship in the United States. The devastation can span from the loss of a building and its furnishings to the risk of injury or even death.

A fire sprinkler system is one important protective measure that can save lives and safeguard congregations from extensive damages and loss.

"A good fire sprinkler system is very effective and can help prevent almost two-thirds of property loss," said Adam Goodrich, vice president of Allstate Sprinkler Corporation in Bronx, N.Y.

As with any piece of equipment, sprinkler systems require regular maintenance to guarantee functionality and proper protection. The National Fire Sprinkler Association (NFSA) recommends a full sprinkler system inspection performed by a trained professional to test all of the valves, gauges and sprinkler heads at least four times a year. However, city and state ordinances might require more frequent inspections, so it is necessary to check regulations with the local fire department.

"Along with quarterly inspections, someone within the organization should check the sprinkler system monthly or weekly for systems without electronic supervision," Goodrich said. "Verify that the water valve is open, the sprinkler system pressure gauges are steady and there is no debris blocking the fire department pumper connections."

In addition, do not paint or hang anything from any part of a sprinkler system. Have a fire sprinkler contractor or a registered fire protection engineer perform a complete re-evaluation of the sprinkler system if any changes are done to the structure or use of the building.

Although regular inspections and precautions might prevent unforeseen problems, cold weather temperatures can cause freezing and burst water pipes. The following preventative measures should be considered prior to and during cold weather:

- Maintain a minimum heat level no less than 40 degrees Fahrenheit to areas that have sprinkler piping. Pay particular attention to piping in attics, entries, stairways, under floors and above ceilings.
- Check fire protection systems more frequently than normal.
- Insulate piping that might be exposed to outside temperatures.
- Contact a professional about installing a dry pipe sprinkler system in locations that have a long duration of subzero temperatures.

Worship centers located in warmer areas need to be concerned with the short-term cold snap. Facilities not constructed and insulated for below-freezing weather are susceptible to freezing pipes during periods of unusually cold weather.

■ **For more information** about fire sprinkler maintenance, safety and regulations, visit [www.nfsa.org](http://www.nfsa.org).

# q|a

## A Perspective

*In many congregations, summertime offers an opportunity for children to attend Vacation Bible School. From crafts and recreation to music and Bible study, most activities are led by volunteers.*

*Risk Reporter spoke with Tom Cook, a volunteer Vacation Bible School director for Jersey Baptist Church in Columbus, Ohio. With more than 35 years of experience, Cook has directed Vacation*



*Bible School programs for five congregations in addition to serving as a children's ministry consultant to the Ohio State Convention of Baptists. Cook offers insight about the importance of volunteer training and safety standards.*

### **Risk Reporter: How do you select qualified volunteers?**

**T. Cook:** We use a specific Vacation Bible School volunteer screening form and procedure consistent with the congregation's overall children's ministry policy. It includes a social security number background check. All volunteers must be over 18 except for teens who assist qualified adult teachers. We do not conduct background checks for teens since we are familiar with their background, and each teen must be approved by the children's ministry director.

Additionally, congregation membership is a requirement, and previous teaching or Bible school experience is required for the lead teacher but not for the assistants.

### **Risk Reporter: Do you offer basic training for your volunteers?**

**T. Cook:** Yes, we provide two training sessions. The first concentrates on curriculum and teaching methods, while the second focuses on local administrative issues, including schedules, logistics and safety.

Training is made available but not required for all volunteers. Many volunteers serve in our ongoing Sunday school program or other children's programs, which use the same policies and procedures.

Our Vacation Bible School and other youth programs are structured to include a lead teacher who supervises other teachers in groups and reports to division directors for children and preschool who, in turn, report to the children's ministry director.

In addition, our organization offers first-aid and CPR training for volunteers.

### **Risk Reporter: What is your volunteer-to-child ratio?**

**T. Cook:** Our ratio varies by age group and assignment, but we generally use a 1:4 ratio for preschool-aged children and a 1:10 ratio for children in grades one through six.

### **Risk Reporter: Do you have specific duties and responsibilities assigned to each volunteer?**

**T. Cook:** We use a rotation system where specific "homeroom" teachers are assigned to a small single-grade group of children and rotate with them to the various activities. The activity group leaders deal with a larger age range that might include two entire grades at the same time.

### **Risk Reporter: How do you factor safety into daily activities?**

**T. Cook:** Safety is something we take very seriously at all Vacation Bible Schools. We select activities with safety in mind.

Ultimately, we implement safety protocols defined for the overall children's ministry by congregation staff, including the director of children's ministry.

In the unlikely event that an accident does happen, we have emergency contact numbers on file for each child, so parental notification is the first step after any required first aid. Our children's ministry has a standard incident report form that is completed and filed.