

# Risk

Fall  
2013

Vol. 7  
issue 3

# Reporter

for Camps and Conference Centers

A quarterly publication by Church Mutual Insurance Company



## Improve camp experience with incident tracking, analysis and follow-up

As another summer ends, it's a good time to take stock of the successes — and challenges — of the past year. Review your data and reach out to staff, campers and parents to make next year's camp better than ever.

### Tap into your data gold mine

The average camp has a wealth of opportunities to collect data, look for trends, pinpoint hazards and uncover gaps in policies and procedures. Here are just a few areas you can look into:

**The health center.** Look at who sought care, for what and the underlying causes.

**Office log.** "Why are parents calling? What can't they learn from your literature or website?" said Linda Ebner Erceg, RN, MS, PHN, the executive director of the Association of Camp Nurses in Bemidji, Minn. "If multiple parents have the same questions, you need to do a better job on the front end."

**Workers' compensation claims.** "These have a direct impact on camps in terms of financial health and work force maintenance," Ebner Erceg said. "It's critical to analyze these claims and look for patterns."

**Incident reports.** "There's a tendency to track accidents, but what you really want to analyze are incidents — anything that occurred that made something fall out of line," said Ebner Erceg. "This could range from a camper losing their luggage on the way to camp to a weather-related problem to a serious injury."

"It's impossible to do meaningful risk assessment unless you have the data to draw from," said Jeff Heiser, senior assistant director of recreation at the University of California, Davis Campus Recreation and Unions. "This information helps us uncover gaps, often in training."

Be sure to include near misses — things that could have led to an incident but didn't, simply because you got lucky. This is quite common in the manufacturing environment, but camps can also benefit from this approach.

"A friend of mine had a great way to encourage campers to be on the lookout for and report near misses," Ebner Erceg said. "Whenever a camper noticed a problem, they were awarded stick-on 'googly eyes,' which went on their name tag and meant that they had 'safety eyes.'"

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*Risk Reporter talks with Scott Schwartz, general manager at CampSite camp management software in Bethpage, N.Y.*

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## ( Camp experience )

**Surveys.** “At the end of every session, we send a survey to parents asking everything from how they heard about us to what they thought of the staff,” Heiser said. “There are places where they can provide narrative feedback to help us gain a better sense of their experience.”

### Gather the right information

You should be able to answer these critical questions for every incident: who was involved, what happened, when did it happen, where and contributing factors.

“Try to gather as much objective information as possible,” Heiser said. “Ask people to share what they saw — not what they inferred.”

Analyze your incidents by whether they occurred with staff or campers, gender, location, time of day and type of incident. Age can be important. “Elementary kids might be more prone to falls because their heads are disproportionately heavier, and adolescents who are going through growth spurts are more likely to be clumsy,” said Ebner Erceg. “You can’t change that physical predisposition to injury, but you can monitor for things that contribute to them like untied shoes.”

Time of day can also be a critical element. “Maybe you’re finding that a lot of incidents happen at dusk when kids don’t have their flashlights,” Ebner Erceg said. “Adding lights to your paths might be a good solution.”

### Nip risk in the bud

**Manage risk before campers arrive.** “Anticipate what kids will need to bring from home to safely navigate camp activities — even something as simple as the right footwear is critical,” Heiser said.

Require personal protective equipment when appropriate and make sure you have systems in place to ensure that it’s cleaned, maintained and replaced when needed and that staff know how to fit the equipment to campers and fasten it properly.

**Analyze hazards.** “When staff are planning activities, the planning form should ask ‘What are the risks associated with these activities, and how can you minimize or eliminate them?’” Ebner Erceg said. “Do this over and over again and people start to do it automatically.”

“Although injuries tend to be more common with sports and outdoor activities, indoor activities have risk too. For instance, we have campers doing woodworking with power tools,” Heiser said.

**Train.** The importance of training cannot be overestimated. Train staff to take appropriate safety measures and don’t make assumptions. “Too many times, we think ‘oh, everyone knows how to use a kitchen knife,’ and we end up with injuries,” Ebner Erceg said.

“We schedule ‘simulation days’ where staff experiences the day as a camper would and looks for hazards and attractive nuisances,” said Amy Lanham, senior assistant director for a children’s day camp on the University of Nebraska — Lincoln campus. “We also run through scenarios, which are often pulled from real situations we’ve had at camp.”

Create procedures for dealing with common types of incidents. “When a problem occurs, people are upset, and their adrenaline is pumping,” Lanham said. “If your procedures are written down and thoroughly practiced, it’s easier for staff to react quickly and appropriately.”

**Teach camp and staffers how to avoid illness.** Close living quarters make it easy for illness to spread rapidly. “Teach people to wash their hands thoroughly and frequently, to sneeze into their sleeve and to sleep ‘nose to toes’ on bunk beds — which means flipping directions between the top and bottom bunks,” Ebner Erceg said.

**Recognize the challenges of downtime.** “When kids are climbing or swimming, staff tends to be hyper alert, but they need to be just as vigilant during downtime,” Lanham warned. “These are the times when there is less active leadership from staff, and we see an uptick in incidents.”

**Analyze risk frequently.** Don’t wait for the end of camp to dissect that season’s risks. “Incident reports come in all the time, and we review them daily and make changes as needed,” Heiser said.

“We run week-long sessions, and each week, we analyze the previous week’s incidents and use this information to determine what needs to be modified,” Lanham said.

**Consider external factors.** “People often only focus on the things that happen inside the camp that they perceive as being in their control,” Ebner Erceg said. “You have to be aware of external things like the flu, power outages, weather, forest fires and the like. It’s critical to track and analyze anything that could affect your ability to run a safe camp.”

**Help families pick the right camp.** Too often, camps don’t do a good job spelling out the skills that campers need to succeed. These include both physical abilities — being able to move independently from place to place in the camp, care for their personal needs without assistance, hike a certain distance, carry a pack of a certain weight and similar — and what Ebner Erceg refers to as the “mesh” factor — mental, emotional and social health.

“Campers should be able to effectively communicate in a camp’s group-based, community living environment,” Ebner Erceg said. “If you have a child who is dealing with anxiety, depression or similar, it’s not just about the health center’s ability to deal with his or her medication — that’s the easy part. To be successful, the child has to be able to integrate into the social environment of the camp.”

cont.





## Managing Your Risks

### Preventing injuries to maintenance staff

The time has come for camps and conference centers to begin closing down or transitioning their operations for fall and winter. With that transition comes maintenance tasks that present the potential for injury to your staff.

To help you prevent these injuries, Church Mutual keeps track of claims that occur at our customers' facilities. In one recent study, we analyzed more than 300 workers' compensation claims that occurred from 2010 to 2012. The results revealed the following injury frequency and severity factors involving camp maintenance employees:

Most frequent and costly injuries	Percent of total number of claims	Percent of total cost of claims
Slips, trips and falls	25.5%	35.9%
Strains	22.2%	37.0%
Struck by/collision with	20.9%	8.6%
Cuts, punctures and scrapes	20.3%	3.6%

This study included workers who are responsible for maintaining their grounds and facilities. It shows that while the types of injuries that occur are somewhat evenly distributed in frequency (number), the severity (cost) of the types of injuries significantly varies.

You can help reduce the frequency of the more severe injuries by:

- Reducing clutter and using good housekeeping practices on walking/working surfaces to decrease the potential for trips and falls.
- Training staff how to properly inspect ladders to make sure they are fit for use and reviewing and enforcing safety procedures for using them.
- Providing safety training on proper body mechanics and lifting techniques.
- Instituting a team-lifting policy when carrying tables or handling large, heavy or bulky items.

To see this full claim study, visit [www.churchmutual.com/RACamp](http://www.churchmutual.com/RACamp) and look for the *Risk Alert* titled "Preventing Injuries to Maintenance Staff."

Edward A. Steele  
Risk Control Manager

# Seasonal Spotlight Fall

### Trail maintenance and construction

There's nothing like a day on the trail — successfully navigating the challenges of the hike, enjoying beautiful views and experiencing Mother Nature up close. Proper trail construction and maintenance are critical to striking the right balance between "thrilling" and "safe."

#### Training

Anyone who's responsible for trail construction and maintenance should have training and experience and know how to safely carry and work with tools. Appropriate safety gear must be worn at all times.

"Carry the Forest Service Trail Construction and Maintenance Notebook," said Jane Pfaff, trail maintenance coordinator for the Headwaters Trails Alliance in Grand County, Colo. "Even people with 20-plus years of experience rely on this."

#### Construction

**Route planning.** "Look for existing wildlife trails," Pfaff suggested. "Animals typically find the best route."

Try to minimize trail grade and be aware of water issues — one of the biggest problems in trail maintenance. "Increasing the length of a trail to attain the appropriate grade through forest or meadow helps toward the ultimate goal — creating a sustainable trail," Pfaff said.

Have your route approved by the appropriate local, state and federal agencies before work begins to avoid a negative environmental impact and costly mistakes.

**Supplies and access.** It's common to use found materials in remote areas but be aware of the consequences of your actions. "You have to know where you can pull out a rock without causing erosion or a landslide, where it's okay to get fill or if putting a rock in that spot will cause water issues," Pfaff stressed. "Don't remove tree roots — it may create a smoother trail bed but kill a tree that prevented erosion."

**Keep it challenging.** "People go outdoors to test themselves and to learn to navigate outside their comfort zone," Pfaff said. "You could never make a trail entirely risk-free. Some level of difficulty — and success in learning to master it — is part of the experience."

#### Ongoing maintenance

**Deal with water.** "Water is usually the biggest obstacle to trail maintenance," Pfaff said. "Look for problem areas — erosion and places where it's not draining — and address them."

**Remove trail obstacles.** "Remove anything on the trail that makes people change their route," Pfaff said. "One small rut can force users off the trail, resulting in a wider tread and the erosion issues that always follow."

- **Resource:** For more information about trail construction and maintenance, find the Forest Service Trail Construction and Maintenance Notebook at [http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/recreational\\_trails/publications/fs\\_publications/00232839/](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/recreational_trails/publications/fs_publications/00232839/)

# Q | A

## A Perspective

*Online tools can be a win-win for campers and camps. They make it easy for families to share and manage camper data, pay fees and offer feedback. Camps like them because they facilitate credit card payments, improve data management and eliminate manual data entry. If you're looking to make the switch to online or want to update an existing system, there are a number of important issues to consider. Scott Schwartz, general manager at CampSite camp management software in Bethpage, N.Y., shared his thoughts.*



### **Risk Reporter: What should a camp look for in terms of function?**

**Scott Schwartz:** Start with your pain points: What do you want to accomplish, and where are you struggling? Choose a system that's flexible, customizable and allows you to manage your data in a way that makes sense for your camp. Find one that's user-friendly and intuitive, both for parents and administrative staff. Make sure the system lets you generate reports quickly and easily and allows you to export that information in a format — usually Excel — that you can then use as you need. This is especially important if you're using another piece of accounting software.

Ask providers to let you log in to a demo account, so you can play around and get a sense of the system. Ask peers what they're using and what their day-to-day experience is like. Is there good training and customer support? What's the learning curve?

### **Risk Reporter: What about data security, especially for financial and medical data?**

**Scott Schwartz:** Your choice should encrypt data at every point of the transaction — look for an "https" before the URL; otherwise, your transmission isn't encrypted, leaving you vulnerable to digital eavesdropping. If you're processing payments directly through the software solution, the system should meet the Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI DSS). This is the information standard for any organization that stores or processes credit card data.

In addition to encryption, you need to be able to configure and restrict data access on a user-by-user basis. Look for a system with a parent portal that requires a unique login ID, has strong password requirements and lets you choose what parents can access and manage.

### **Risk Reporter: Any other questions to ask of a prospective provider?**

**Scott Schwartz:** Make sure you own your data. You should be able to get your data out of the system at any time, even after your contract ends or if you switch to a new provider. The provider should also be backing up your data — ideally multiple times an hour.

### **Risk Reporter: Anything camps should keep hard copies of?**

**Scott Schwartz:** Internet connections might not be reliable in a remote setting, so print out and file a camper's medical profile and emergency contact information. Sensitive data should be kept under lock and key — have users sign in and out — with access limited to appropriate staff. Shred hard copies at session end, so they can't be compromised.