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Improve security with better safety plans

Camp is a place to relax and enjoy the wonders of Mother Nature, but savvy administrators know that behind every positive “natural” experience is a carefully thought-out safety program.

Recent tragedies have made violence top-of-mind, but these types of terrible events are extremely rare. While no two camps are alike, every plan should reflect the possibility of such a catastrophe but give equal consideration to more common occurrences, such as fires, accidents, natural disasters and the challenges related to being in a rural, often isolated, setting.

1. Involve experts and your staff

This lets you combine recognized best practices with camp-specific insights and can help gain staff buy-in. John Ojeisekhoba is chief of public safety at Biola University in La Mirada, Calif., a reserve police officer and founder and CEO of J&O Emergency Management and Security Consultants. He stressed choosing an expert with camp-specific experience, a thorough assessment process and liability insurance and involving staff from executive management, security, medical, operations, business and community relations.

2. Know your hazards

Consider the risks you’re most likely to face.

Natural. Are you prone to earthquakes, tornadoes, floods, blizzards, etc.?

Location. Is your camp spread out, isolated or hard to access?

Public access. Is your camp located in a national or state park? Does a public road run through it? Do you share a body of water with the public?

Special needs. What are the mental, physical, developmental or sensory challenges of campers or staff?

3. Create robust security systems

Ojeisekhoba recommended the following:

Appropriate barriers — You can’t fence large areas but take measures to protect cabins and activity centers. Train staff to be very observant and maintain a high level of awareness around cabin areas at all times.

Signage — Indicate that camp is private property and only guests and visitors are permitted.

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Risk Reporter talks with Chris Smith, director at Camp Horizons in Harrisonburg, Va.



(Safety plans)

Security teams — Security teams can help protect against everything from a human intruder to a wild animal. Your security plan will dictate their role and training.

Staffed access points — Staff entry points 24/7 and require every person who enters camp to use this entrance. Staff should always wear a dated photo ID, campers can have colored armbands and parents and other visitors should show photo ID.

4. Partner with local safety resources

Invite emergency responders to your camp and ask them to review and improve your plan. “We have former military and law enforcement experts on our board, and they’ve been invaluable,” said Dr. Michael Anthony, president of Hume Lake Christian Camps in California’s Sequoia National Park.

5. Document your plan

A plan shows you took reasonable steps to address risk. Work with a safety expert and have it reviewed by your camp’s legal team and local law enforcement agency. “You’ll never be able to protect your camp from everything, but a plan offers viable options,” Ojeisekhoba said. “Imagine if there was an incident and you hadn’t done anything to protect your campers.”

6. Review your plan regularly

Assess at least annually and anytime something occurs — either at your camp or outside — that prompts you to reevaluate your crisis readiness. Document revisions.

7. Have effective communication tools

Many camps can’t get reliable cellphone reception. Have your staff carry satellite phones, walkie-talkies or radios at all times. Larger camps might also consider sirens or other alarms.

8. Prepare and enable your staff

Assign roles and responsibilities to key staff members (your emergency response team) and counselors. Keep a comprehensive plan in your camp office and provide all staff and counselors with a quick reference guide.

The emergency response team must be empowered to act decisively if the unexpected happens. Things rarely go as planned in an emergency, and these key staff must understand your goals and feel they have permission to make changes as events demand. “Apply your plan during minor incidents — say, a power outage,” Ojeisekhoba said. “It’s a ‘test run’ and can help uncover gaps.”

Drills and tabletop exercises — where key staff goes through a created scenario — are also good.

9. Evacuations

Evacuations can mean moving campers to a section of camp or leaving the property. Head counts are critical. At the evacuation site, have campers assemble in cabin units. “If

we come up short, the counselor stays with the kids, and we start a search,” Anthony said.

Few camps have enough vehicles to transport all campers and staff. Have able campers walk while those who are disabled or injured travel in vehicles. As you leave, have staff bring up the rear and search buildings along the way.

10. Lockdowns

True lockdowns are challenging because many buildings lack window coverings and locks. Moveable bunk beds and dressers can be shoved against the doors and windows; camps can also investigate easy ways to barricade buildings from within. If there’s an active shooter, avoid having crowds of people congregate in one place.

11. Stock sufficient supplies

“Plan for the worst,” Anthony said.

Have twice as much food on hand as you anticipate needing, four times as much water — and water treatment supplies — and fuel for three weeks longer than campers’ anticipated stay. Other suggestions: a warehouse of dried goods in the event of power outages and sufficient plastic bags to deal with waste if toilets can’t flush.

Keep supplies in multiple locations in case one cache is destroyed or can’t be reached. Maintain sufficient medical supplies to deal with chronic conditions, such as asthma and diabetes. Each counselor should have an emergency supply bag with a list of campers under their care, first-aid supplies, a radio, a flashlight and extra batteries.

12. Connect with parents

Parents are understandably anxious about security. “Strike a balance — too much information could compromise your safety,” Anthony said. “We let parents know we take security very seriously without giving specific details.”

The special challenges of an isolated camp

“If your camp is at least 30 minutes away from the closest law enforcement, you must function as your own first responder,” Anthony said. “We have EMTs, doctors and nurses, an ambulance, a wired alert system, a helicopter landing pad and fire trucks.”

If you have armed people on staff, make sure they receive in-depth, ongoing training that’s consistent with law enforcement standards.

Training is just one element. “Have a strict policy on the use of deadly force,” Ojeisekhoba said. “It should only be if a person’s life is in imminent danger or there is reason to believe that a suspect’s actions could cause grave bodily injury that could lead to death.”

- **Resource:** <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/camp/camp-safety-plan-guide.pdf>





Managing Your Risks

Hazardous chemicals at camp

Chemical products that are commonly found at camps and conference centers can expose campers, guests and staff to personal injury or property damage.

Some commercial cleaning supplies, for example, contain chemicals that have the potential to cause significant injury if ingested, inhaled or they come in contact with exposed skin. Certain paints, paint strippers, deck cleaners and brush cleaners left over from projects or stored for future projects can also pose potential injury exposures.

As a best practice, your camp should take an inventory of all chemicals used for operations and maintenance of your facilities. Staff should be trained on how to safely handle and apply specific commercial chemical products that are used as part of their job duties. Some examples include bathroom cleaners and disinfectants, products used to keep kitchen and dining areas and cooking equipment sanitized, chemicals used to maintain water quality in swimming pools and hot tubs and insecticides and rodenticides.

A Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) should be obtained and kept on file for each chemical product used by staff. Access to MSDS information should be readily available to staff for their review. The sheets also provide vital information to emergency medical staff in the event that an injury does occur.

Each MSDS is intended to provide staff and emergency personnel with procedures for handling or working with the named substance in a safe manner. An MSDS includes important information, such as toxicity, health effects, first-aid procedures, reactivity, appropriate storage and disposal, need for personal protective equipment and spill handling procedures. These sheets can be obtained from the product manufacturers and suppliers.

Edward A. Steele
Risk Control Manager

Seasonal Spotlight

Nighttime activities require special attention

Long twilight hours and warm temperatures make after-dinner activities popular in summer. But be aware of the hazards that darkness can present and follow the advice of Carl Adkins, director of support services for the Middle Tennessee Council for the Boy Scouts of America (BSA), in Nashville, Tenn. "Don't leave anything to chance."

Never assume. "We drill our policies into the kids and staff," Adkins said. "They know what is and isn't allowed."

Recognize that campers and staff are tired. "Camp days are long and physically exhausting," Adkins said. "By the time the sun goes down, adults and kids need downtime. We usually have about 80 percent of our activities during the day and 20 percent at night."

Allow pool swimming only. Never allow open water swimming in the evening or night. Make sure your pool area and pool are well lit — you should be able to see the bottom of the pool at all times. Maintain a sufficient ratio of lifeguards to swimmers. The BSA recommends one lifeguard to every 10 participants.

Additional information can be found on our website, www.churchmutual.com, by clicking Safety Resources, then Swimmer and Water Safety.

Employ a buddy system. "Everyone gets a buddy and is supposed to keep an eye on them," Adkins said. "At regular intervals, the supervising adults should ask buddies to raise their hands and be accounted for."

Let campers know that even a quick trip to the restrooms, cabins, etc., requires traveling in pairs.

Ban nighttime bike riding. Put bikes away as soon as twilight hits. Make helmets a standard policy at all times.

Keep the lights on. Any areas used for outdoor nighttime activities should be well lit. Require staff and campers to travel with a flashlight at night.

Limit access. If possible, gate or otherwise block access to prohibited areas, such as the waterfront. Post signs that forbid trespassing and nighttime entrance.

Follow fire safety procedures. Campfires and s'mores have long been part of the camp experience. To ensure campfire safety, follow these BSA safety rules:

- Only light fires when an experienced adult is present. Keep wood, trees, bushes and other fuel sources away from fire and thoroughly extinguish all fires.
- Build campfires away from tents and tarps.
- Never leave a fire unattended.

Have strict policies and follow through. "Campers should know that if they're found where they shouldn't be — for instance, on the waterfront at night — they will be sent home," Adkins said. "Their safety is paramount, and you can't afford to make exceptions."

Q | A

A Perspective

Once virtually unknown in some parts of the country, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that some kind of tick can now be found in every state. Ticks are responsible for a range of debilitating conditions, including Lyme disease and Rocky Mountain spotted fever, and a tick bite can be extremely dangerous if left untreated. However, with education and frequent tick checks, it is possible to minimize the danger these tiny pests can pose for campers and staff. We spoke with Chris Smith, director at Camp Horizons in Harrisonburg, Va., to learn more.



Risk Reporter: There seems to be a philosophical divide between camps that try to eradicate ticks and those that focus on avoiding them. What are your thoughts?

Chris Smith: We're always concerned about the impact of chemicals on the environment and the campers, so we try to identify where ticks are a big problem and avoid those areas. But we also recognize that if we banned every potential tick site, we'd never go outside!

Risk Reporter: What steps do you teach your staff and campers to take?

Chris Smith: If conditions permit, it's ideal to wear long pants tucked into socks, long-sleeved shirts and a hat. But in the summer, it's so hot and humid that those choices aren't always practical, so we've turned our focus to education. We tell staff and campers to walk in the middle of the path and to avoid high grass. We teach them what ticks look like and the importance of frequent tick checks. We discuss where ticks like to hide — warm, moist places like waistlines, the underwear line and body crevices — and to check frequently, so ticks have less time to burrow in. Clothing checks are important too. It's best to do a tick check right after ending an activity, but that's not always convenient. Otherwise, we tell campers to do a check whenever they change clothes and before they go to bed or take a shower. We have signs in their cabins and the shower rooms to remind them. Check in a place with good light and use a mirror for places that are hard to see.

Risk Reporter: If someone finds a tick, what happens next?

Chris Smith: Everyone's taught to go to medical personnel — they are the only people who are allowed to remove a tick. They've been instructed in proper technique and know to bag up the tick and label it for analysis. We educate all campers and staff on what the classic Lyme disease "bull's-eye" rash looks like and tell them to report this immediately if they see it as well as any other symptoms like achiness or feeling like they have the flu.

Risk Reporter: How do you balance getting kids to take this seriously without overly alarming them?

Chris Smith: Kids come to camp to enjoy nature but also to learn to respect it. It's like seeing a snake — you're at camp, you might see a snake and you should tell us if you do. But that snake — or that tick — shouldn't keep you from enjoying the outdoors as long as you know the proper way to deal with it.

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- **Resource:** For more information about preventing tick bites, visit: <http://www.cdc.gov/Features/StopTicks/>