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Coordination is key for youth volunteer efforts

There's hardly a shortage of volunteer work to be done, and religious organizations are no stranger to coordinating volunteer efforts in their communities. But as with any coordination efforts, there are proper steps to take to execute a successful volunteer project, especially when working with youth.

Volunteer opportunities are abundant within communities year-round, and youth members of local worship centers are often called upon for team projects, such as mowing a member's lawn, assisting with yard work or other simple projects.

But what are the best ways to organize a project that calls for the volunteer work of young people, and how can you minimize the risks involved?

Know the role

"Before even starting to recruit, it's important to put together a job description," said Kathy Martinson, director of the Volunteer Center for the United Way of Dane County in Madison, Wis. "Doing that makes it clear in my mind exactly what we need the volunteers to do, why we need them to do it and how much time it's going to take."

Writing a clear job description for volunteers will help make it a positive experience for both volunteers and coordinators. Include elements such as:

- Expected time commitment
- Specific responsibilities
- Training opportunities
- Contact information for a project supervisor
- Any benefits included

"Once you have all of those areas clearly defined, you can figure out what kind of person is going to want to do that job and where you can find them," Martinson said.

Will the volunteers need certain skills or interests? When they sign up, will they know exactly what they're signing up for? These are questions best answered before volunteer recruitment begins.

Reduce risk before it's a factor

"Before a project begins, consider any and all risk factors and address them," Martinson said. "Provide orientation and training for the volunteers, so they can meet one another and become familiar with any equipment."

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(coordination)

From ladders to lawn mowers and copy machines to phone systems, volunteers might need a refresher course on how to safely and accurately use the equipment.

"Don't assume that everyone is going to know how to use the necessary equipment," Martinson said. "People might not always think about those kinds of things on their own."

The United Way recommends the following be included in any orientation and training:

- Key written materials
- Introductions to other staff and volunteers
- Specific instructions on what their job does and doesn't entail
- Training on any equipment volunteers will use
- Emergency procedures
- Explanation of how the volunteer's work fits into the big picture and why their help is important

John Mosey, Cub Scout pack leader in Wauwatosa, Wis., works regularly with his Cub Scouts on volunteer projects. Through his work with young people, he's become well versed in the necessary safety precautions to take with children and young adults.

"Any time we participate in an event or a volunteer project, we have rules in place, and we are clear up front about what those are," Mosey said. "We 'promote' older boys to serve as examples and role models for the younger ones. That kills two birds with one stone by teaching leadership to the youth as well as assuring that the younger children are obeying rules."

Create a plan

Before a project begins, establish procedures to handle details, such as transportation, meals and emergencies.



Safety also should be a priority during all volunteer work. Keep a well-stocked first-aid kit at the volunteer site along with any safety equipment specific to the volunteer task, such as protective eyewear or gloves.

"Have emergency contact information on file for all volunteers," Martinson said. "That information should include a list of medications and allergies."

Advise volunteers whether they need to bring their own lunch or if lunch will be provided. The same recommendation applies for transportation to and from the volunteer site.

"For Cub Scout events, we usually recruit additional volunteers, like parents or chaperones, to cook meals and provide transportation," Mosey said.

How young is too young to volunteer?

"A child is never too young to volunteer if given the appropriate duty," Mosey said. "If they can walk and talk, they can volunteer."

However, as volunteers get younger the supervision requirements increase. Some kid-friendly volunteer opportunities include helping to hand out fliers at local events or participating in park garbage cleanups.

"In my pack, the younger kids love 'competing' for most garbage collected or helping out with car washes," Mosey said. "During the holidays, we also volunteer to sing at the local senior home."

The United Way will generally leave minimum age requirements up to the organization requesting the services.

"Depending on the work, the age requirement is often 15 or 16, although it can be younger if there are parents or teachers present," Martinson said. "Volunteering at a young age helps to develop leadership skills and morals. It becomes a part of the fabric of that child."

When all is said and done

"Working with volunteers parallels in many ways to working with paid staff. They deserve the same respect, attention, value, time, training and recognition," Martinson said.

"When the project is completed, it's beneficial to follow up with a debriefing of the volunteers."

Some good information to gather in a debriefing includes:

- How did the volunteer feel about the job?
- Would the volunteer like to continue volunteer work?
- Are there other skills the volunteer would like to utilize?
- Are there any changes the volunteer would like to see next time?

"Try and do a one-on-one if you can," Martinson said. "A follow-up survey also is good. It's important to provide someone an opportunity to give feedback. It shows you appreciate their work and their opinion."

- **For more information** about volunteer coordination, visit www.churchmutual.com, click on "Safety Resources" and select "Workforce Management" and then "Volunteers."



Managing Your Risks

Boiler inspections

As the Seasonal Spotlight feature in this issue of *Risk Reporter* recommends, keeping an annual maintenance program is important for the operating effectiveness and efficiency of an HVAC system.

If your facility has a boiler, annual maintenance takes on a heightened level of importance for two key reasons. One, the additional risk of explosion due to the pressure aspect of a boiler; and two, most states have inspection requirements. Failure to meet these requirements can lead to hefty fines. Some cities also have separate inspection requirements.

Wyoming and Idaho are the only states that do not have boiler inspection requirements.

To assist our customers, Church Mutual has partnered with Hartford Steam Boiler to provide these mandated inspections — commonly called jurisdictional inspections — at no cost. Boiler owners in Chicago are required to schedule inspections through the city's Boiler Inspection Bureau.

If you have a boiler in need of a jurisdictional inspection or have any questions about the inspections, call the Hartford Steam Boiler hot line at (800) 333-4677. A qualified customer service representative can outline your inspection requirements as well as schedule an inspection.

Church Mutual customers in Idaho and Wyoming are welcome to call the hot line with questions about nonmandated inspections.

Although the inspection is free, any state or city certificate fee is charged to the owner of the boiler.

Richard J. Schaber, CPCU, CRM
Risk Control Manager

■ **For more information** on the inspection service and boiler safety in general, go to www.churchmutual.com, click on "Safety Resources" and select "Buildings and Grounds" and then "Boiler Safety."

Seasonal Spotlight

Maintain HVAC systems with five simple tips

Waiting until the weather turns cold is not the best strategy to ensure your place of worship stays warm during the winter months. A proactive approach with maintenance and monitoring for heating, ventilating and air conditioning (HVAC) equipment will help avoid expensive repairs and keep temperatures comfortable year-round.

"There are some very simple things congregations can do to help maximize the efficiency of their HVAC units while minimizing repair costs," said Michael Diack, president and CEO of The Pipe Doctor Plumbing, Heating & Air Conditioning, Inc. in Long Island, N.Y.

Change filters regularly

Many problems arise when HVAC systems do not get proper airflow. Change indoor filters monthly — especially during the summer. If the HVAC unit is on a rooftop, change the filters quarterly to keep air flowing.

Watch thermostats carefully

"Many times we find thermostats have enough power to keep the 'low battery' indicator off but not enough power to flip on the circuit needed for heating or cooling," Diack said. "This can be easily prevented by changing thermostat batteries annually."

If a thermostat becomes unresponsive, inaccurate or has a broken button, contact an HVAC professional immediately.

Keep HVAC units clear

"Regularly, we find objects smothering or even protruding into the HVAC unit, greatly limiting airflow," Diack said.

Keep vines, bushes and plants away from outdoor HVAC units. In addition, do not store objects on or near indoor units. Let the HVAC unit "breathe."

Monitor heating/cooling power and unusual noises

The most common warning signs for a faulty — or soon to be faulty — HVAC unit are changes in heating or cooling power and strange noises.

"If the heat or air conditioning becomes more or less powerful, there is a good chance something is wrong with the unit," Diack said. "Also, if the unit is louder, squeaks or has a noticeably different sound, contact an HVAC professional immediately."

Schedule an annual HVAC inspection

"All HVAC equipment should be inspected annually by a professional," Diack said. "The inspection keeps the HVAC system running efficiently while identifying potential problems, such as high carbon levels or a heater that does not produce a proper flame."

■ **For more information** about HVAC maintenance, visit Church Mutual's website at www.churchmutual.com, click on "Safety Resources" and select "Buildings and Grounds" and then "HVAC."

Q | A

A Perspective

Water damage can happen at even the most well-maintained facility, and places of worship are no exception. Rain damage and appliance overflows are common causes of these inconvenient, and oftentimes disastrous, events.

Risk Reporter spoke with Mike Adair, vice president of account management for Legacy Services Corporation, about water damage restoration. Legacy Services Corporation,



based in Minneapolis, Minn., specializes in full service fire and water restoration as well as indoor environmental remediation.

Adair shares his advice on what to do if your worship center suffers water damage.

■ **For questions or assistance** with fire and water loss mitigation or remediation issues, contact Mike Adair at mike.adair@legacyservicescorp.com.

Risk Reporter: When water damage is first discovered, what should be done to prevent further damage?

M. Adair: When dealing with a water damage situation, it is extremely important to remember that time is critical, and any delays in the mitigation process can cause additional damage and potentially adverse health effects. You should first try to locate the source of the water problem and eliminate it, if possible, or contact an appropriate company to carry this out. However, be extremely careful of potential electrical shock hazards when entering areas with standing water.

Risk Reporter: What should be done immediately to treat wet materials, such as drywall, carpeting and hardwood?

M. Adair: If there are no electrical shock risks, turn off circuit breakers for the damaged area(s) and remove any small electrical appliances. Initially focus on removing furniture and contents that are susceptible to water damage or staining. Lift and secure porous fabrics, such as draperies and furniture skirts, to minimize possible water migration. Place aluminum foil under legs of wood furniture that cannot be moved to another area. Notify Church Mutual of the water loss incident, and a representative will assist you in finding a professional water loss mitigator to help with the dry-out process. The water loss mitigator will set up specially designed air movers and commercial dehumidifiers to begin the structural dry-out process. Household fans are not recommended for water mitigation as they could potentially spread mold contamination and increase the risk of electrical shock in wet areas.

Risk Reporter: Aside from appearance, what are some other dangers from water damage?

M. Adair: Personal safety is critical when dealing with a water damage situation. There is a risk of electrical shock and possible slip hazards along with potential injury from damaged building materials, such as falling debris from wet ceilings. In addition, the type of water involved in the loss also can be a concern as to whether it is clean water or potentially contaminated water when generated from events, such as sewer backups. Other issues also need to be addressed regarding whether certain building components might be affected by mold contamination or perhaps contain asbestos, lead or other hazardous materials.

Risk Reporter: What steps can a congregation take to prevent mold in wet areas?

M. Adair: A potential mold problem typically can be prevented by fast and effective dry-out procedures. It's important to stress that mold does not automatically become a problem just because there has been water damage. Depending on the type of building material affected, mold normally will not grow for at least 24 to 48 hours. This emphasizes the importance of a fast and effective structural dry-out process. However, if visible mold is identified, it is best addressed by a qualified mold remediation contractor, properly trained and certified to meet state and local requirements.