

Risk Reporter

Summer
2013

Vol. 12
issue 3

A quarterly publication by Church Mutual Insurance Company



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Safety inspections of nurseries and children's ministry rooms could mean life or death

If your congregation operates a nursery or children's ministry, you need to be aware of some sobering statistics. For the three-year period of 2007–2009, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) reported 341 deaths associated with nursery products, such as cribs, swings and high chairs, among children younger than five. In 2011, an estimated 74,100 emergency department-treated injuries among the same age group were associated with nursery products.

These statistics are an indication of the dangers that might be lurking in nurseries and children's ministry rooms. While these facilities are typically exempt from state and federal safety laws, the reasons for periodic safety inspections of such rooms are clear.

Jenny Funderburke, minister to children at West Bradenton Baptist Church, believes safety inspections are crucial and probably aren't done enough in ministry. "No one wants to see a child hurt, and we have a responsibility to protect the church from liability," Funderburke said.

The logic that "this could never happen here" is the biggest and easiest risk to overcome. Funderburke recommends that the children's minister, or leader of the ministry, inspect rooms regularly. She says it also is helpful to have a third party occasionally walk through the area with a fresh set of eyes.

"Violations should be addressed and fixed immediately, and the inspection process should be evaluated to make sure it doesn't happen again," Funderburke said.

Here are a few things to look for and tips for addressing violations:

Cribs

According to the CPSC, the leading cause of nursery product-related deaths is cribs/mattresses. Based on the types of deaths and injuries reported, the commission implemented new federal requirements for all cribs manufactured after June 28, 2011. Additional information about the regulations can be found in the Summer 2011 issue of the *Risk Reporter*.

Nychelle Fleming, a children's product expert at CPSC, says the safest crib is a crib that meets the new crib standards.

"Look for the tracking label on the crib itself that says it's manufactured after June 28, 2011. That's how you know whether your crib is compliant," Fleming said.

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cont.



(Safety inspections)

Noncompliant cribs should be replaced. Fleming also encourages congregations to monitor for crib recalls on the CPSC website at www.cpsc.gov.

Baby's sleep environment

What you put in the crib is as important as the crib itself. "Nearly half of infant crib deaths and two-thirds of bassinet deaths reported to the commission each year are suffocations from a baby being placed on top of pillows and thick quilts or because of overcrowding in a baby's sleeping environment," Fleming said.

In addition to always placing a baby on its back to sleep, the CPSC's "Bare is Best!" guidelines recommend keeping all pillows, quilts, comforters, cushions and positioning devices out of cribs, bassinets and play yards.

Play yards

A play yard is a framed enclosure with a floor and mesh or fabric side panels. A new federal play yard standard just took effect on Feb. 28, 2013. It requires side rails that do not form a sharp "V" when the product is folded, stronger corner brackets to prevent sharp-edged cracks and to prevent a side-rail collapse and sturdier mattress attachments to the play yard floor.

Congregations should check for these hazards on play yards manufactured before Feb. 28, 2013, and dispose of them if necessary.

Toys

A hazard that's always present for children is toys. "The leading cause of toy-related deaths is small-parts choking," Fleming said. "The No. 1 way to prevent these deaths is to be aware of all toy product recalls. Congregations can do that by signing up for free email notifications at www.cpsc.gov."

Fleming also recommends checking the condition of all toys and looking in toy boxes to make sure pieces or parts haven't broken off.

Of all children's products, balloons are the leading cause of suffocation death, according to CPSC injury data. Uninflated balloons and pieces of broken balloons are the biggest concern. The CPSC recommends that children under the age of eight be supervised when playing with uninflated balloons.

Other things to look for with toys are strings, straps, ribbons and necklaces. To prevent strangulation, CPSC recommends cutting off the cords, strings and straps on toys.

Magnets

Magnets pose a serious threat if ingested. If two or more magnets or a magnet and another metal object (such as a small metal ball) are swallowed separately, they can attract to one another through intestinal walls, causing holes, twisting and/or blockage of the intestines, infection, blood poisoning (sepsis) or death.

Keep small magnets and small pieces containing magnets out of the reach of young children and regularly inspect toys and play areas for missing or dislodged magnets.

Furniture and television tip over

It's an unavoidable fact — children like to climb on furniture.

"We're seeing, on average, one death every two weeks in this country from furniture and television tip overs," Fleming said.

Fortunately, there's a simple, low-cost solution to prevent a tip-over tragedy:

- Buy and install low-cost anchoring devices that can prevent televisions, dressers, bookcases and other furniture from tipping.
- Place all televisions on a sturdy, low base and push the televisions as far back on the base as possible, particularly when anchoring them is not possible. For more information, visit www.churchmutual.com, click on "Safety Resources," select "Risk Alerts" and "Television Cart Safety."
- Keep items that might interest children off the top of furniture.

Other hazards

Other things to inspect include:

- Access to stairs and other dangerous areas: Safety gates block children from hazardous areas and prevent falls. Use gates that meet current standards.
- Access to standing water: Babies can topple over and drown in just a few inches of water. Access to toilets should be blocked, and buckets of water should be removed.
- Cabinetry and drawers: Use safety locks or latches.
- Cleaning products: Keep them out of the reach of children or behind locked cabinets.
- Windows: If your room is elevated or on the second floor, use window guards to prevent children from pushing out screens and falling.
- Outlets: Use outlet covers/plates to protect children from electric shock and possible execution. If you are replacing receptacles, use a tamper-resistant type.
- Smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors: Check once a month to make sure they're working. Change batteries at least once a year or consider using 10-year batteries.
- Window coverings: CPSC recommends using cordless window coverings in areas with young children. If you have window blinds from 2000 or earlier and you cannot afford new, cordless window coverings, call the Window Covering Safety Council at (800) 506-4636 or visit www.windowcoverings.org for a free repair kit.

■ **For more information** on child safety, visit CPSC's Safety Education Centers at www.cpsc.gov/en/Safety-Education.



Managing Your Risks

Proper workplace ergonomics

Does your organization have clerical employees or volunteers, including administrative assistants, receptionists or support staff? Although the tasks involved with these titles might not sound particularly dangerous, they present significant potential for work-related injuries.

In fact, in a recent five-year period, Church Mutual paid nearly \$7 million in claims related to injuries caused by reaching, repetitive motion or twisting. Many of the injuries were the result of improper workplace ergonomics.

Appropriate workplace ergonomics involve fitting workstation conditions and job demands to the individual who uses the workstation.

Office workers often sit for long periods of time at their workstations. Improperly designed or arranged workstations can make workers more susceptible to issues, such as back and neck injuries, carpal tunnel syndrome, headaches and poor vision.

Preventing injuries due to poor workplace ergonomics is one way you can help protect your employees and volunteers. Church Mutual developed the following tools to help our customers analyze their workstations and determine how to properly adjust equipment to fit the individuals who use them.

■ Prevent Pain and Injury with Improved Workstation Ergonomics – This 12-page booklet provides an introduction to proper workstation ergonomics, including illustrated guidelines you can use while adjusting or setting up workstations and tips that office workers can use to help prevent injuries.

■ Improved Workstation Ergonomics: Employee/Volunteer Checklists – This four-page checklist offers an easy way to evaluate workstation ergonomics and implement solutions, if needed, for each of your staff.

■ Workstation Ergonomics Poster – This 11-by-17-inch poster can be hung near workstations to remind staff to use appropriate ergonomics.

Customers can order these workstation ergonomics materials at no cost on our website, www.churchmutual.com, in the Safety Resources section.

Edward A. Steele
Risk Control Manager



Summer

Finding the right shelter for severe weather

As the temperature increases during the summer months, so does the possibility for severe weather.

"Weather can turn severe in a matter of minutes," said Harold Brooks, research meteorologist at the National Severe Storms Laboratory in Norman, Okla. "Protecting your congregation begins with identifying a safe room or shelter area."

Selecting an appropriate shelter

"Sanctuaries might seem like a safe area to gather during severe weather, but that couldn't be further from the truth," Brooks said. "Avoid rooms that are open, have a lot of windows or have an open-span roof."

In addition, gymnasiums should not be used as shelters unless they were engineered to sustain high winds.

The best shelters are small, windowless, interior rooms on the lowest floor of the building. When possible, look for rooms with concrete walls.

"If you have a small group, bathrooms on the ground floor make great shelters," Brooks said. "They hold up well because they are generally small rooms that have pipes reinforcing the walls."

Brooks also recommends avoiding hallways with exterior doors.

"Exterior doors can blow open turning a hallway into a wind tunnel, making it very dangerous for flying debris," Brooks said.

Safe rooms and shelter areas should be identified with clear signage. In larger buildings, use additional signage throughout the building to help guide people to the designated shelter sites. Each safe area should be equipped with battery-operated flashlights, a weather radio and extra batteries.

Educating your congregation

Staff, volunteers and members need to be made aware of your severe weather procedures and shelter area locations. Staff and volunteers should receive annual severe weather training that includes how severe weather will be monitored and how staff will be notified if there is severe weather in the area, in addition to the process for guiding members to the designated shelter areas.

"I recommend designating one week in early spring to severe weather awareness at your organization," Brooks said. "You can make announcements before services and hold severe weather drills to help educate your members and staff."

■ For more information on weather-related safety tips, visit www.churchmutual.com, click on "Safety Resources" and select "Weather Risks."

Q | A

A Perspective

In addition to raising money for ministries, missions and other causes, fundraisers build community within a congregation. But along with the benefits of fundraising comes the liability. What can a congregation do to keep fundraiser participants safe?

Risk Reporter spoke with Jeff Kertscher, community and missions pastor at



West Acres Baptist Church, about the fundraisers his congregation does for its student ministry and mission trips.

Risk Reporter: What types of fundraisers does West Acres Baptist Church use and how do you oversee the fundraising efforts?

Kertscher: Most of our fundraisers are individualized and sales based. We find that door-to-door fundraisers, such as plant and frozen pizza sales, work very well. We tend to avoid car washes, spaghetti dinners and those types of events because the cost and reward doesn't balance out as well.

All fundraising efforts are required to adhere to our fundraising policy. The policy defines the different types of fundraising efforts our organization might engage in and provides general information about how events should be run. This includes scheduling and promotion, in addition to approved facility locations for fundraising events and our accounting requirements. All fundraising efforts must be approved through our application process. The application requires basic contact information as well as details about the proposed event.

Risk Reporter: What guidelines or best practices do you follow to keep fundraiser participants safe?

Kertscher: A majority of our fundraising efforts include participants who are high school and middle school age. At this age, parent involvement is extremely important. We require that all parents review specific information and guidelines for the activity.

For these types of student ministry events, adequate adult supervision is our most important guideline. Regardless of the type of fundraiser, we require at least one adult supervisor, either a staff member or volunteer, for every five teenagers.

Risk Reporter: What type of fundraiser has presented the biggest safety challenges, and how did you prepare for them?

Kertscher: This year, a mission trip group hosted a babysitting night. We held extremely close to all of our preestablished nursery guidelines, rules and regulations. Our administrator worked with the group to make sure they were compliant when it came to getting proper information for the fundraiser, such as food allergies and emergency contact information for the children. Everyone who assisted with the fundraiser had to have a background check. There also was proper adult supervision. And we made sure to check with our insurance company to see if the event would be covered under our policy.

- **For more information** about the West Acres Baptist Church fundraising policy, visit www.westacres.org.