

Risk Reporter

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Check-in systems: important for ministries of every size

As a parent, there are few feelings worse than not knowing where your child is. And as an organization, there are few experiences worse than realizing you sent a child home with the wrong guardian. To help make sure your organization doesn't encounter this distressing series of events, it's important to track when children are checked in to and out of your ministry's programs.

Whether an organization has 25 or 5,000 children attending its programs and activities each week, the importance of a check-in system is the same for all religious organizations.

Why it's important to track children

"There are many reasons to keep track of kids, but at the top of the list is safety," said Kim Conley, co-owner of By the Book, a company that produces Roll Call, a popular electronic child check-in system.

Regardless of the type of check-in system an organization implements, below are a few key reasons why it's important for your organization to keep track of children:

Guardians

It's vital for organizations to know that children leave with the proper guardians each and every time.

"In our congregation, all of the kids come in and out of one door, which means there are a lot of parents in one place during checkout," said Tim Cash, children's ministry volunteer at Church of the Beach Cities in Manhattan Beach, Calif. "It can get a little hectic at times, and we want to make sure that the right children and adults are connected."

Some congregations may believe that it's not necessary for small organizations to use child check-in systems because they "all know each other." Contrary to this belief, small organizations are often more susceptible than large organizations to issues because they are less likely to have strict security measures, such as child check-in systems, in place.

In addition, a significant number of missing children are taken by someone they know. This could include family members, friends or even parents who don't have custody.

"The most important reason we use a child check-in system is for security, especially for our younger children," said Rick Cooper, executive pastor of Grace Fellowship Church in Paradise, Texas. "And a large part of that is due to custody issues."

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(Check-in systems)

The primary security feature of the Roll Call Child Check-in software is that it produces a random number each time a child checks in to an event. The number is printed on the child's name tag as well as a second tag given to the parent. During checkout, the adult must show that his or her number matches the number of the child being checked out — this ensures that only the person who checked the child in can check him or her out.

Special circumstances

Check-in systems allow organizations to keep track of special notes and reminders about children, such as food allergies, designated guardians or birthdays.

"Our program allows organizations to customize what information is printed on the child's name tag each week," Conley said. "For example, if they want a weekly reminder of what food allergies a child has, that can be included right on the name tag, so there's no guessing or making a mistake."

Emergencies

In the event of an emergency, a check-in system will help the children's ministry staff and volunteers know which kids are present and who needs to be accounted for once everyone is in a safe location. Many electronic programs allow administrators to quickly print class rosters once all children are checked in each week.

Care

By setting up a strong check-in solution, your children's ministry communicates that it takes its responsibility and role seriously and that you care about the children.

"Tracking attendance allows organizations to easily conduct personal follow-up with first-time visitors or regular attendees who have missed several weeks in a row," Conley said.

Electronic vs. pen-and-paper check-in systems

As technology continues to advance, child check-in systems continue to advance as well. Today, there are a number of electronic, and even mobile, check-in options available for religious organizations.

"We used to use paper and pencil to keep track of our kids but transitioned to an electronic system about two and a half years ago," Cash said.

One key benefit of electronic check-in systems is that more than one person can see the check-in status at one time in most programs. Check-in is more efficient because there can be multiple stations that sync together to create one master attendance list. And most electronic systems offer a higher level of security through random number matching, displaying photos of approved guardians or requiring fingerprints to check children in and out.

Another perk of electronic check-in systems is that there are options available to meet every organization's needs.

Some offer check-in software only; others include a host of organization management features, including membership databases and accounting programs. Some are web-based programs — meaning they run on any computer but require an Internet connection; others are software programs that can only be accessed on computers that have installed the program, but an Internet connection isn't necessary. Some operate at computer stations; others have mobile devices that can be used throughout a building. Some require economical monthly fees; others require larger, one-time fees.

"At Roll Call, we offer a variety of check-in tools to accompany our electronic program, including bar code scanners and key tags, name badge printers, fingerprint scanners and mobile check-in options," Conley said. "With such a variety of options, even a small organization can afford an electronic check-in system."

"Our organization is relatively small, and we rent a community building for our services each Sunday, so I have to pack up all of our supplies each week," Cash said. "I use Roll Call because it's loaded on my laptop, and I can take it in and out with me each week. Also, I can take it to off-site children's events to check in kids and keep track of everyone."

Some customers make their check-in systems work harder by using them for women's events, youth groups and inner-city youth programs in addition to children's events.

Mobile check-in systems

By the Book added a mobile child check-in option to its Roll Call child check-in software in early 2012.

"Many of our customers wanted the ability to hop on their tablets or smartphones to check kids in or to get a quick glimpse of how many students were in each class at a given time," Conley said.

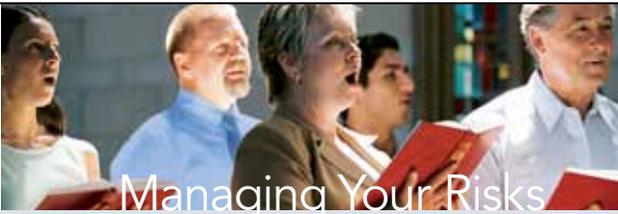
"We've used Roll Call for several years now, and we were excited to try the mobile check-in system," Cooper said. "We have three tablets in our student building to check in fifth-grade students and up. We use the computer stations to check in our younger children."

Another benefit of the mobile check-in system is that when visitors are checking in, a staff member can check them in on the spot, walk them to the name tag print station and then walk them to their designated classroom.

Alternative check-in options

For organizations that aren't ready for a comprehensive electronic child check-in system, a self-created digital document, such as an Excel file, could easily become a check-in system. And, ultimately, the most important goal is to keep children safe. Religious organizations don't have to invest in an electronic system in order to accomplish that goal — something as simple as pen and paper still works too.

■ For more information about Roll Call, visit www.bythebook.com.



Winter

Seasonal Spotlight

Access control an important security measure

On Page 1, we talked about the importance of check-in systems and monitoring the coming and going of children. It also is important to track the traffic of other individuals into your facility to help prevent losses, such as theft of property and misuse of your facility.

Embedded in the operation of a house of worship is an obligation to ensure that your building is secured at all times without placing undue burden on employees, members or guests. Building security starts with a good key control policy. Your policy should include:

- Guidelines for loaning keys to authorized employees or members.
- Procedures for issuing keys to contractors and other third parties who require entry into your building to perform, for example, maintenance work.
- Instructions for returning keys upon termination of employment or a contractor's completion of work.
- Procedures for locking doors to internal rooms, such as electrical or mechanical rooms, that are off limits.
- Guidelines for locking up the facility after use, including a walkaround of the building to ensure that all doors and windows are secured.
- Steps to follow if a key is lost or not returned. Remember that your organization faces a security risk if locks are not rekeyed.

Due to the high cost involved with rekeying several locks, some facilities have implemented an electronic lock system. Such a system can either use the mechanical lock hardware from the former keyed lock system, or new electronic locks can be installed. This allows entrants to use swipe cards or key fobs to gain access to buildings. The electronic locks can be reprogrammed to accept new swipe cards or key fobs if old ones are lost or not returned.

Consider contacting your local police or sheriff department and asking them to conduct a crime prevention and security review of your property. They can make additional suggestions to help improve security at your worship center.

Edward A. Steele
Risk Control Manager

Keep bugs and other pests out of your facility

Pest control is a year-round job. However, the cold winter months present an additional challenge as pests and rodents seek shelter from the elements.

Ron Harrison, Ph.D., entomologist and technical services director at Orkin, says infestations frequently occur in the winter months.

"The change in seasons plays a major role in infestations," Harrison said. "Rodents typically come inside during the fall as temperatures start to drop. Mice and rats are looking for warmth, shelter and a place to breed. Cockroaches, ants and other pests are attracted to heat and moisture as well."

Harrison offers several tips to help identify and prevent rodent and pest infestations.

Identify hazards

Dumpsters, mulch and trees around the perimeter of a building and even certain types of lights can attract pests. In addition, tall grass, yard debris and wood piles can help pests or rodents reach an entry point into a building.

"Bathroom, kitchen and classroom windows and doors are popular entry points because of the heat and moisture," Harrison said. "Keep in mind that pests and rodents don't need a large space in order to gain entry into a building."

Rodents can enter a building through an opening the size of a dime. Bugs can find their way in through gaps in screens, cracks and crevices.

"Food storage areas also are prime targets for pests, especially if food is poorly sealed or out of date," Harrison said.

Focus on prevention

"Pests and rodents will often make their way into a building, even if there are no attractants," Harrison said. "However, organizations should focus on making entry as difficult as possible."

Seal cracks on the outside of the building, including doorways and entry points for utilities and pipes. Keep storage rooms, basements, attics and crawlspaces well-ventilated and dry.

Keep garbage in a sealed container and dispose of it regularly. Keep dumpsters, firewood and other outdoor debris at least 20 feet away from the building. Trim tree branches and shrubbery regularly. Keep floors clean and tackle spills immediately. Standing water and areas with excess moisture also should be addressed right away.

Food should be stored in tightly sealed containers or in a refrigerator or freezer. Use or throw out fruits and vegetables that are past their prime.

"An inspection of your grounds and buildings with a licensed pest control provider can help identify additional problem areas," Harrison said. "A local professional also has knowledge about the risks presented by regional pests and rodents."

- **For more information** about pest control and extermination, visit www.orkin.com.

Q | A

A Perspective

This past year was one marked by several natural disasters, including Hurricane Sandy.

Many relief efforts are centered on providing food, clothing

and shelter to the victims, but often

what victims need most is a sense of

comfort and security. Risk

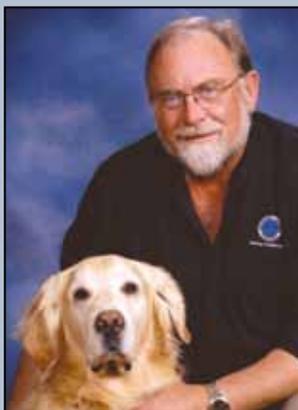
Reporter spoke with

Tim Hetzner, president of Lutheran Church

Charities, about the K-9 Comfort Dogs ministry, which brings service dogs to victims of natural disasters and other tragedies.

Hetzner shares information about the K-9

Comfort Dog program and how they help individuals and families in need.



Risk Reporter: What are the comfort dogs primarily used for?

Hetzner: The dogs were first used for disaster response work only — we would bring the dogs in to be with families immediately after disasters. After the Northern Illinois University shooting in 2008, we brought the dogs in to be with students. A few months later, we visited again, and the students loved it. They remembered the dogs, knew their names and were happy to see them. That's when we changed our strategy — why wait for disasters to bring in the dogs? Now, anyone, regardless of religious affiliation, can request a visit from a comfort dog. We regularly place dogs in churches, schools and other religious ministries.

Risk Reporter: What sort of precautions do you take when bringing a dog on a visit?

Hetzner: During the visit, the dog handler is responsible for protecting the dog and making sure it stays safe. We start training the dogs at five and a half weeks old, and training can last eight months to a full year. We teach them special commands, such as to lie down on a hospital bed. If we're taking dogs to a disaster relief site, we'll take other precautions, like equipping them with booties to protect their paws.

Risk Reporter: How do you ensure that people interacting with the dogs stay safe?

Hetzner: We only use golden retrievers for the programs, as they are generally smart, lovable and friendly dogs. Our dogs are first trained and certified as service dogs, and then they receive individual training specific to the location they will be placed. They must not bark, bite, jump up, growl or be aggressive toward others, or we will not use them in the program. Before taking a dog on a site visit, we walk them through all the basic commands to make sure they are on top of their game that day. Dogs, like humans, have some bad days where they just don't want to be around people. Although it is rare, we still check them out each time before going to a site.

Risk Reporter: What sorts of qualities comprise a successful visit?

Hetzner: We want the people we are visiting to feel a sense of comfort and relaxation. It's amazing how the dogs can help people open up. People will talk to the dog like they are talking to a counselor; it's a way for them to process grief and other emotions. Dogs can sense when a person is hurting, and sometimes the dogs will lead the trainers to specific people at disaster relief sites. All of our dogs have Facebook profiles and email addresses, so people can, and do, keep in touch with them.

Risk Reporter: How can someone request a visit from a comfort dog?

Hetzner: Requesting a visit from a comfort dog is easy! Visit our website, www.lutheranchurchcharities.org, and fill out a site visit form. Currently, we have placed dogs in six states. However, our comfort dogs are available to visit disaster sites anywhere in the U.S.

- **For more information** about other canine therapy organizations, visit www.therapydogorganizations.net.