

# SAFER SPACES

Lowering risks for guests and staff across your property







From cuts and scrapes to floods and fires, camps and conference centers can be exposed to several risks to guests, staff and property. However, there is no singular solution to removing all risk at camp. Creating a safer environment requires diligence and a multi-layered approach, including training, preparation and mitigation techniques and a team focus on safety and risk mitigation. ►

As Daniel Redding, director of operations at Ridgecrest Conference Center (Ridgecrest, North Carolina), noted, “I’m not sure you can say your property is free from risk at all times, especially when so much of what we do is outdoors.” However, he said his team does its best to “be intentional and attentive to safety concerns as we work to mitigate as many risks as possible.”

### Minimizing Risk

While every part of your property and programs needs to be evaluated and managed to lower risk, there are some areas that require extra, and sometimes ongoing, attention. One of the most obvious places to start is with the physical property. As most camp directors know, walking can sometimes be the riskiest thing a camper or guest can do on your property. Unpaved paths, unearthed roots and uneven surfaces can lead to increased risk.

Kyla Pinto, risk control specialist at Church Mutual Insurance Company, S.I., said that while walking seems like the simplest part of a week of camp, having training on the importance of awareness while walking in varying environments can reduce the number of falls on your camp. Maintaining walkways, decks and other elements of your property is important to ensure guest safety, as well as making sure those areas have appropriate lighting and visibility.

Beyond protecting your guests and staff on your property, it’s essential to consider how best you can protect the grounds of your ministry. Floods and fires are two major potential dangers to camps, but damage can often be reduced through mitigation steps.

Guy Bratton, vice president of operations at Camp Cho-Yeh (Livingston, Texas), emphasized the need to maintain storm drain systems and monitor them consistently for clogs and debris as integral to flood prevention. He also encouraged others to consider pre-storm preparations, like having sandbagging materials on hand and building sediment collection basins upstream of silt-prone bodies of water.

After a big storm, it’s important to stay on top of ditch erosion with velocity breaks, outflows and culverts, re-seeding dirt work for soil retention and monitoring bacteria levels as runoff can cause contamination spikes, Bratton said. “Monitor storms as they are happening. Intervention in the moment can save you from more significant impacts,” he shared.

In addition, Redding expressed the importance of regularly inspecting gutter and downspout systems for buildings to keep water flowing where it is intended to go instead of pooling to flood a building or roadway.

Fire mitigation is essential, especially if you’re in a drier climate. Redding suggested clearing buffers around buildings while making sure buildings are equipped with fire alarms and sprinkler systems. Ridgecrest also has a monitoring system that initiates a rapid response if a facility is compromised by fire.

Be intentional about regular inspections and clearing of fallen trees and debris on trails and around the property. Bratton suggested controlled burns as a prevention method (in conjunction with your local fire department), as well as ensuring that fire extinguishing tools are in areas of high risk (like water near the campfire pit and fire extinguishers in cabins and buildings).

Kitchens are another area where safety is paramount. In addition to cuts and burns that kitchen staff may experience, when proper care is not taken in the kitchen you run the risk of widespread illness that could impact all your staff and guests.

Culinary professor Lance Nitahara, former executive chef at CAMP-of-the-WOODS (Speculator, New York), said cross-contamination is the biggest risk for foodborne illness in a camp kitchen environment. This often takes place in the refrigerator when staff incorrectly store food items while trying to fit a lot of things into a small space. Calibrated thermometers are a critical piece of kitchen equipment to help reduce the risk of foodborne illness.

In addition, lack of (or improper) handwashing also increases the risk of contamination. To reduce the risk, Nitahara suggested disposable gloves for physical handling of foods and when maintaining clean spaces. “Using gloves changes the mindset of the staff to increase awareness of cross-contamination and increases handwashing and other key food safety principles,” Nitahara explained.

Elsewhere on your property, following the guidelines and proper usage of other things like helmets, harnesses and life jackets can keep guests and campers safer. ►





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Photo courtesy of Camp Lebanon

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## **Training and Assessments**

No matter how well-equipped and prepared your facilities are, without proper training and policies in place, there will be increased risks. In addition to roles like lifeguards or ropes course operators, where specific training and certifications may be required, it's important to focus on training for your entire staff.

In addition to standard staff training, Pinto recommends that summer staff have repeated training sessions throughout the season to keep rescue techniques and emergency plans fresh on staff members' minds. At Camp Cho-Yeh, a "Safety Week" happens once a year to help staff focus on "big picture policies and procedures, with special attention to specifics," Bratton shared.

Beyond training, it's important to have regular assessments of your facilities and policies to ensure that areas for growth can be identified. There are two critical categories of assessments: internal self-assessments by those familiar with the area and third-party assessments from outside sources with fresh eyes to see different details.

Self-assessments are essential, as no one is more familiar with the realities of an area of camp than those who spend a lot of time there. Brotherhood Mutual and Church Mutual have extensive resources of risk self-assessment checklists available online for any camp or conference center to use.

At Ridgecrest, Redding implements "periodic, recurring safety walks focused on identifying areas of concern." He also recognizes the need for fresh eyes. "We tend to overlook things because we are used to it," Redding explained.

Redding welcomes audits from Ridgecrest's insurance company. Bratton has used an outside inspector to do a full site audit. These walk-throughs are important to spot needs for repairs or improvements around camp that can increase safety. ►





## Claims and Protection

### *What insurance companies say*

Church Mutual Insurance Company, S.I. and Brotherhood Mutual Insurance shared several of the top claim categories from camps and conference centers over the last five years. These include slips/trips/falls, physical/athletic activity, sexual misconduct, collision/crash, animal/insect bite/sting/scratch, drownings, medicine distribution and food poisoning.

There's no way to guarantee a 100% risk-free environment, so Kayla Pinto, risk control specialist at Church Mutual recommends the "Swiss Cheese Method," where you layer your elements of protection. She explained, "Independently, some insurance components aren't enough, but if you layer the coverages, you will have better protection." Layers of protection include:

- Making sure physical property and gear are in good condition and appropriate for the activities at hand.
- Having staff safety training and policies that are clear and well-practiced.
- Performing regular inspections and assessments from outside, third-party perspectives and from staff familiar with the areas and equipment.
- Using a reporting system to track what is working or not working for continued improvement.

Find resources from both insurance companies to help make your camp or conference center safer at [www.ccca.org/go/brotherhoodmutual](http://www.ccca.org/go/brotherhoodmutual) and [www.ccca.org/go/churchmutual](http://www.ccca.org/go/churchmutual).



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## Reporting and Tracking Incidents

Regular assessments are closely tied to consistent reporting and tracking of incidents. Redding emphasizes the importance of the reporting system for staff who are doing safety walk-throughs. It creates a “paper trail” that shows what repairs and improvements have been made. The facilities team trains staff to use the work order system to submit concerns they identify at Camp Cho-Yeh.

Documentation of incidents is essential for Juli Peterson-Lee, R.N., the health supervisor at Mt. Gilead Bible Camp and Conference Center (Sebastopol, California). “I think staff see documentation as a way of highlighting what didn’t go right,” Peterson-Lee shared, “but I see it as a valuable tool to see what we are doing right and what we can improve in the future.”

Jon Ruybalid, legal counsel for CCCA, said that reporting incidents and identified potential risks, and the documentation of steps taken to address those, are important for showing your ministry’s attention to these matters. Ruybalid explained, “An injured party would attempt to show that the camp knew about the risks and prior incidents and did nothing about it. Paying attention and responding to incidents and identified potential risks shows that the camp is not negligent. Negligence would be the basis for a claim against the camp if an injury occurs.”

The pillars of training, assessments and reporting increase the layers of protection necessary at camps and conference centers. While there’s no way to be 100% risk free in a camp environment, Peterson-Lee said, “I try to anticipate potential problems and have potential solutions along with backup plans.” She has come to expect the unexpected and has also “learned who, what and where my resources are when needed.” ■



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