



Tech-Letter

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CAMP SAFETY MANAGEMENT

- Protecting our children away from home -

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I. Introduction

Camps are a very important part of the socialization and recreation of young people. Camping helps to provide young people with the opportunity to meet other children of their own age group and engage in a wide range of educational and recreational activities. Often, for children that live in cities or in the suburbs, camps can also serve as the first real introduction to nature. It is likely because of these reasons that camping has been so popular with children for such a long period of time.

While camps are interesting and challenging for the children that attend them, camps also entail a number of safety risks. Due to the simple fact that camps involve a number of recreational activities and that a number of young children are often involved with those activities, there will be a good chance of accident or injury. For these reasons, it is very important that all camps have adequate safety rules and procedures in place in order to protect the welfare of the children that attend them.

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2. Camps and Camping

2.1. History of Camping

Camping has been a very important and popular activity among children and adults for a substantial amount of time. Throughout history, individuals from a number of diverse societies and cultures have been engaging in different types of explorative activity. In many ways, the exploration of the recent past shares a great number of similarities with the camping that takes place today within contemporary society.

A good definition of camping comes from the Statement of Compliance that the American Camping Association requires camps to sign. This definition provides: "Camping is a sustained experience which provides a creative, educational and recreational opportunity in group living in the out-of-doors. It utilizes trained leadership and the resources of natural surroundings to contribute to each camper's mental, physical, social and spiritual." (American Camping Association, 1999b). This definition represents the mission that camps have attempted to accomplish and the roles that camps have attempted to play throughout history.

Throughout the current century, camping has played a very important role in the lives of children. Both in the United States and in certain other societies, such as western Europe, camps have served as a useful recreational outlet for children of all ages. Through camps, children have been provided with a brief, but memorable respite from their daily existence. Camps have also provided these children with significant educational and recreational experiences.

2.2 Camping Injuries

Just as camping has provided children with a number of important educational and recreational opportunities, camps also involve a number of safety risks. Such safety risks are dangerous because they put children at a risk for minor to major injuries and may leave the camp exposed to legal liabilities (van der Smissen, 1990). Many children who have attended camps have incurred injuries. The majority of injuries that children receive at camp are relatively minor. These minor injuries usually include problems such as insect bites, poison ivy and other reactions to poisonous plants, cuts, scrapes and abrasions.

Minor injuries often arise due to a number of causes. These kinds of injuries frequently arise due to a lack of adequate supervision of the children that attend the camps. Children who are not being carefully monitored at camps may wander away from the

regulated areas of the camp and into areas in which poison ivy and other dangerous plants and animals exist.

In addition, when camp attendees are not carefully supervised, they may play more roughly with one another. Such rough playing likely to contribute to a greater incidence of accident and injury.

Injuries of minor to moderate severity may also arise when children are not made fully aware about the safety rules governing a particular camp. Even if a camp has all the necessary safety rules, if children are not made aware about the rules, it will be impossible for them to obey them. This can contribute to injuries sustained by individuals attending camps.

It is also important that camp attendees are made aware of the reasons for the safety rules. Some children may disregard safety rules even if they are made aware of these rules if they think that the stated rules do not have valid rationales for their existence.

Many moderate injuries are also caused by the equipment that is available for use by children in camps, trampolines in particular, camp equipment they also present a number of risks for injuries. In fact, the American Academy of Pediatrics has estimated that there were 83,400, trampoline-related injuries in 1996 (Steadman, 1999). The majority of injuries caused by trampolines appear to be sprains. The second most predominant injury caused by trampolines is fractures. This does not mean that potentially dangerous equipment such as trampolines should not be used in camps. It does mean, however, that extra care and safety training should be devoted wherein this kind of equipment is being used.

Play equipment such as are used on most major playgrounds, can also present a number of problems. At present, in New York City, major efforts are underway to modernize and replace a number of existing playgrounds as the equipment used on such playgrounds do not conform with existing federal safety standards and may very well present safety risks for the children who use them (Stewart, 1999). Such old playground equipment could also present risks to children when this equipment is used at camps.

Injuries can also be caused by the kinds of transportation that are being used. For instance, the National Transportation Safety Board recently announced its finding that the standard yellow school bus provides better crash protection than vans and thus should only be the only type of vehicle used to transport students (Johnson, 1999). Despite this

finding, a number of camps rely upon vans and other smaller means of transportation and does not use yellow school buses. This factor can be contributing to injuries sustained during accidents.

Occasionally, campers may also sustain serious injuries while camping. In addition to some of the causes of minor to moderate injuries, as mentioned above, serious injuries sustained by campers can result from a number of causes, including: drowning, falling off cliffs or highly elevated areas, fires, illness caused by exhaustion and/or exertion, abuse and/or neglect by camp counselors, food poisoning and animal attacks.

Just as there are a wide range of ways in which campers can incur serious injuries, there are also a wide range of causes for these serious injuries. For instance, some injuries are caused by inattentive and/or inadequately trained staff. Problems can also arise if camps are located in particularly dangerous geographic areas, such as high on mountains, or near dangerous surf. In addition, campers can be injured if camps do not institute adequate safety procedures or invest sufficient money in ensuring that the necessary safety precautions are being taken.

3. Means of Safety Regulation in Camps

3.1 ACA Accreditation

The American Camping Association and its accreditation process is very important within the context of regulating the safety of camps. At present, approximately only one in four camps is accredited. This is unfortunate, as there are a number of benefits to ACA accreditation.

The main purpose of the ACA accreditation program "is to educate camp owners and directors in the administration of key aspects of camp operation, particularly those related to program quality and the health and safety of campers and staff." (American Camping Association, 1999a). A secondary, but also important purpose of ACA accreditation is to provide assistance to the public in selecting camps that meet industry-accepted and government-recognized standards of safety and camp operation.

Camps that are interested in obtaining ACA accreditation will be required to complete a number of steps (American Camping Association, 1999b). Initially, camps will be required to complete an accreditation application and submit the required fees.

Secondly, camps wishing to be accredited by the ACA would have to attend a Standards Course, offered by

the local ACA sections. These Standards Courses explain the accreditation process and describe the requirements of the standards.

The next step for those camps seeking ACA accreditation would be to review and evaluate each area of camp operations according to the guidelines in the standards. At the same time, camps should prepare materials and written documentation, as required by the standards. Next, a camp seeking accreditation by the ACA would have to participate in a visit by a team of ACA-trained visitors. Such visitors would spend a day at the camp, observing its operations and working with the camp's director in scoring compliance with the standards. In this regard, it is important to note that the visit to the camp must occur at a time when the camp is in full operation.

Finally, the camp's administration must sign a statement of compliance on an annual basis. This statement of compliance constitutes the camp administration's promise to operate ethically, legally and in compliance with all of the ACA standards.

3.2 OSHA

The Occupational Safety and Health Association (OSHA) of the United States Department of Labor was established by Congress on 1970 (P.L.91-596). OSHA plays an important role in ensuring that all individuals have a safe place in which to work. "It is a requirement of OSHA that employees be given a safe and healthy workplace that is reasonably free of occupational hazards". (OSHA, 1999a).

OSHA vision is to make America's workplaces the safest in the world and it strives to do so in a number of ways, including the passage of standards and interpretations (OSHA 1999b). OSHA has an important role to play within the context of camps. Given the fact that camps are places in which there are many potentially dangerous recreational activities, camp workers can be at a special risk for occupational hazards. OSHA contributes to the safety of camps in a number of different ways. For instance, OSHA mandates that employers are required to provide medical and first aid personnel and supplies commensurate with the hazards of the particular working environment (OSHA, 1993, OSHA, 1991).

OSHA has also released a number of standards that can be applicable to the camping industry. Recently, OSHA released a new standard on blood born pathogens (29 CFR 1910.1030). One of the central provisions of this standard is that employers are responsible for identifying job classifications in which there is a reasonable anticipation that workers come

in contact with blood and other potentially infectious materials in the course of accomplishing assigned work tasks. In camps, young attendees often engage in strenuous physical activities and may often incur both minor and major injuries (OSHA 1992a). Accordingly, there is a reasonable likelihood that camp workers will come into contact with blood. As such, this new standard of OSHA is likely to be of extreme importance to camp workers.

The standard on blood born pathogens does not state to precisely which workers and which industries it will apply. The standard does apply to all employees who have occupational exposure to blood or other potentially infectious materials ("OPIM"). In this regard, it is important to note that occupational exposure is defined as "reasonably anticipated skin, eye, mucous membrane, or parenteral contact with blood or other OPIM that may result from the performance of an employee's duties." (OSHA, 1992b). It will be the employer's responsibility to determine which if any of the employees in a camp have occupational exposure. Depending upon the particular camp and the duties of the individual at the camp, this could be all camp workers, or only a selection of them.

One of the most important components of this standard concerns the requirement that all individuals with occupational exposure to blood or OPIM be offered a hepatitis B vaccine by their employer. The intention of this requirement is to reduce the likelihood that hepatitis B will be spread through camp activities in which blood and OPIM may be transferred from one person to another.

Although the requirement of offering hepatitis B vaccines has received a large amount of attention, it is not the only component of the standard. Significantly, the standard also requires that employees who are occupationally exposed to blood must be provided with training and protective equipment. Within the context of camps, it would be useful to training about blood and OPIM to be included in the general safety training offered to all camp workers.

This standard may cause camps to incur additional costs and responsibilities. However, it does appear to be a well-reasoned requirement. It is likely to help reduce the spreading of hepatitis B and other infectious diseases among camp workers and camp attendees.

Also notable with regard to OSHA and the regulation of camps concerns the fact that in April 1999, OSHA drafted a proposed safety and health program rule.

Pursuant to its current drafting, the intention of the proposed rule is to ensure that each workplace has a basic safety and health program that is appropriate to its specific conditions. OSHA proposed rule contains certain core components that would have to be included in all safety and health programs: 1) management leadership and employee participation; 2) hazard identification and assessment; 3) hazard prevention and control; 4) information and training; and 5) evaluation of program effectiveness. (OSHA, 1999c)

3.3 Camp Rules and Regulations

In addition to the regulations imposed by federal and state guidelines and organizations, many camps create their own safety rules that govern the operations of their camps. Often, there are general safety conditions, as well as specialized rules for water sport safety and emergency safety rules. Often, all of these different rules are published in a handbook that is distributed to all of the campers (Youth Camp Handbook, 1999)

In addition to defining general rules to govern camp operations, camps may decide to limit the availability of certain equipment and/or activities at their establishments due to their inherent risks. The reality is that a number of popular camping activities involve a number of different risks. Such risks often fall into different categories including: risks of minor injuries, risks of major injuries, risks of environmental injuries and risks of emotional injuries (Tholkes, 1998)

It will be up to a particular camping establishment to assess the various risks, including the risks of legal liability, involved with a particular activity and decide whether that activity should be offered (Hronek & Spender, 1997, Keyes, 1995).

In many cases, even certain activities are risky, camps may still determine that it is in their interests to offer such activities. In such cases, a camp will have to take all necessary steps to reduce the risks that are involved with such activities. Significantly, the hiring of trained, experience staff can help to reduce the risks involved with a number of popular camp activities (Rollins, 1998). The use of the correct equipment that is properly maintained and frequently examined for malfunctioning can also be of use in reducing risks and preventing injuries (Attarian, 1998).

(Continued, WSO Tech-Letter October 1999)