

# risk

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# reporter

for camps and conference centers

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## Staffing camps is a year-round process

Dotting all the I's and crossing all the T's is important in all walks of life but even more so when you're responsible for the safety and well-being of 20,000 people each year.

That's how many folks visit the H.E. Butt Foundation Free Camps in the Texas hill country annually. Of that total, 1,500 are boys and girls who attend the Laity Lodge Youth Camp.

They are watched over by 220 paid staff members and 75 volunteers. Associate Director Chandler Pruitt is the person the H.E. Butt Foundation relies upon to select these personnel.

It's a job that's in a constant state of flux.

"Approximately 40 percent of our counselors are in their first year, 30 percent in their second year and 20 percent in their third year," Pruitt said. "Only 10 percent are in their fourth year and beyond."

All first-year counselors must have completed their senior year of high school. Volunteers must have completed their junior year of high school. The typical age range for both positions is 17-23. So, in addition to being new to the job, many of the counselors and volunteers are entering the work force for the first time, creating additional challenges.

Pruitt said that the hiring process begins each year at the conclusion of the summer camp season.

"Applications are made available to existing staff on Oct. 15," Pruitt said. "We begin offering contracts to leadership staff in November and to our counseling and support staff in January."

Pruitt's hiring process involves many layers:

- Every potential employee, both returning and new, is required to submit an extensive employment application.
- Each applicant is required to submit a valid driver's license, driving history record, Social Security card or birth certificate, consent to a criminal background check, physical performed by a doctor and three personal references.
- Each applicant is given a thorough, personal interview and evaluated based upon the interview, application, background check and references.

(See staffing, Page 2)

## inside

### Seasonal Spotlight

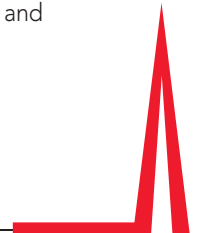
*Don't make bunk beds a high risk*

### Managing Your Risks

*No passengers allowed—ever*

### Q / A

*Risk Reporter talks with ChoicePoint about background screening for nonprofit organizations*



**( Staffing )**

- Upon hiring, employees are required to agree to and sign an employment contract, which includes the dates of employment and salary.
- The contract is reviewed and signed by Pruitt.
- Employees then attend a staff-training week.
- Job descriptions are the rule rather than the exception.

**Good hiring practices aren't confined to camps and conference centers**

The Chicago Public Schools (CPS) District is the third-largest in the nation, with 655 schools, 44,417 employees and 408,601 students.

Its hiring process begins each June.

"Last year, between June and August, we processed (checked references on) over 4,000 new district employees," CPS spokesman Malon Edwards said.

It's imperative that its employees pass rigid qualifying standards.

"When we're hiring, we have the person complete a rigorous screening process," Edwards said. "This includes a fingerprint background check to ensure that employees have not been convicted of any enumerated crimes or crimes against children."

CPS uses a third-party vendor that works with the Illinois State Police to process state and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) background checks.

Employees also have to clear a physical exam and complete training for sexual harassment awareness and mandated reporting within 30 days of hire to ensure that new hires understand their responsibility to report any suspected child abuse or neglect. Credentials are checked for all employees, including teachers and specialized educational support personnel.

"If they're a math teacher, we want to make sure that they're certified and endorsed for each of the age groups that they say they're certified for," Edwards said. "Of course, if they're a school nurse, we want to check those credentials as well."

As you can see, camps and schools, both of which deal largely with the nation's youth, follow similar hiring procedures.

Employment law attorney Sara Ackermann of Ruder Ware in Wausau, Wis., says the selection process should involve the following steps:

- All of your applicants should complete an application.
- During your initial interview, have an associate participate if possible. Get a second impression.

- Review all of the statements on the application. Pursue gaps you may notice. Have your list of questions prepared.
- Contact all references and employers. Keep their responses in a separate interview file—not the personnel file.
- Follow up with a written request if you don't get a telephone response.
- Prepare a written summary of those responses.
- Do a background check on candidates you want to hire and volunteers you want to use, especially if they'll be working with children.

"Recommended screens include Social Security verification, a national criminal search, a state criminal search, a county criminal search and a sexual offender search," Ackermann said.

"Drug and alcohol testing is another area to consider," Ackermann's partner, Ron Rutlin, added. "Some states require that you distribute a test policy before you can require testing."

- **For more information** on background checks, see Q/A on Page 4.

**Higher-risk activities deserve specialized attention**

Special skills jobs require special training.

That's why large operations like the H.E. Butt Foundation Laity Lodge Youth Camp in Kerrville, Texas, pay special attention to who they hire for positions that could involve life-and-death situations:

- Lifeguards are trained on the property, located two hours northwest of San Antonio, by American Red Cross-certified instructors. "Their training includes an intensive lifeguarding class, including cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) certification," Associate Director Chandler Pruitt said.
- Nurses are interviewed and hired by the health care director, who is a registered nurse (RN). All candidates must be RNs, currently registered in the state of Texas. Each nurse is required to review and sign a contract, which states the job responsibilities and salary.
- Drivers must be age 18 or over, have a clean driving record and take vehicle orientation training.
- Ropes course staff are trained by a certified instructor on every element, are tested and must pass a skills test before being allowed to work with campers.
- Archery and rifle range staff are extensively trained by certified instructors.



## Managing Your Risks

### No passengers allowed—ever

Walking through numerous camps and conference centers over the years, I have often come across a variety of vehicles used for maintenance and other projects—tractors, ATVs, nonlicensed trucks, golf carts and others. I am always assured that only approved staff members are allowed to use the vehicles, and guests are never allowed onboard.

The claims files at Church Mutual tell a different and often tragic story.

- A counselor on an ATV offers a ride to two teenage campers. As he climbs a hill, the ATV flips over and lands on the two passengers. No one is wearing a helmet. One of the passengers is killed and the other injured.
- A group of campers is loaded into the beds of three pickup trucks to be transported to the swimming area. The dust on the dirt road prohibits one driver from seeing the truck in front of him. Campers are ejected from two of the trucks when the collision occurs. Unbelievably, there are only minor injuries.
- Two employees working with a tractor are needed on the other side of the camp. One employee gets behind the wheel; the other climbs into the tractor's front bucket. The driver loses control and hits a tree. The passenger is seriously injured in the accident.

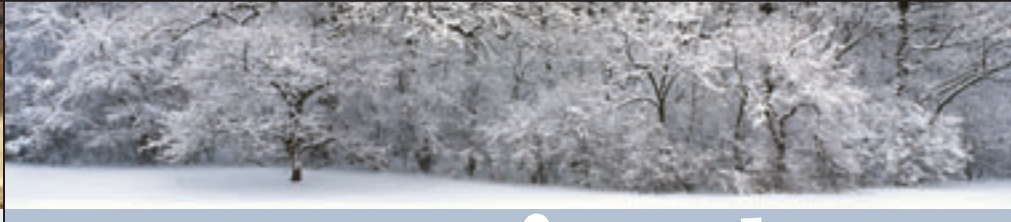
In hindsight, it's easy to see how poor judgment played a huge role in every one of these accidents. Many would say common sense should have prohibited this from happening. Obviously, it didn't.

Strict rules regarding the use of maintenance vehicles need to be written and enforced by all camps and conference centers.

Punishment for violating the rules needs to be harsh and swift. A one-strike-and-you're-out policy can certainly be supported.

Take the time today to review your rules or create them if they don't exist.

**Richard J. Schaber, CPCU**  
Risk Control Manager



# seasonal spotlight winter

### Don't make bunk beds a high risk for campers

The smaller they are, the harder they fall.

Although that saying may seem inverted, it really isn't when you're talking about bunk bed injuries.

A National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study found that from 2001-2004, an estimated 23,000 children ages nine years old and younger were treated annually in U.S. emergency rooms for bunk bed fall-related injuries. Of that total, approximately 63 percent were age 6 or younger.

The damages sustained were largely fractures, lacerations, contusions, abrasions and internal injuries.

It's essential that camps take steps to minimize the risks of bunk beds.

Some guidelines from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission that were developed in 2001:

- Install upper-bunk guardrails. Lower bunks with mattress foundations that are 30 inches or less from the floor do not need to have guardrails.
- The guardrail next to the wall or on the side opposite to the ladder must run continuously from one end of the bed to the other. If the guardrail does not attach to an end of the bed, the gap between the end of the guardrail and the nearest end of the bunk bed cannot be greater than 0.22 inches.
- The guardrail on the side of the bed away from the wall does not have to run continuously from one end of the bed to the other. But the distance between either end of the guardrail and the end of the bed nearest to it cannot exceed 15 inches.
- Guardrails must be attached to the bunk bed with fasteners that you have to release to take the rails off, or they must require you to move them in two or more different directions, one after the other, to take them off.
- The tops of the guardrails must be five inches above the top of the mattress.

Bourdons Institutional Sales in Claremont, N.H., has sold thousands of both metal and wood bunk beds over the years.

"You should have an inspection policy," Bourdons Sales Manager Charlie Aiken pointed out. "Make a list of what needs to be done for each bed. Make sure all beds are in good working order."

Metal beds tend to last longer than wood.

Other tips:

- Position upper bunks low enough to avoid head bangs against the ceiling.
- Provide sturdy ladders.
- Put novice campers in bottom bunks.
- Maintain supervision in sleeping quarters to reduce horseplay.

# Q | A

## A Perspective

*Background screening has become essential in maintaining the safety of children at camps and conference centers across the United States.*

*With that in mind, Risk Reporter spoke with ChoicePoint Senior Vice President and General Manager of Screening and Authentication*



*Solutions Bill Whitford.*

*ChoicePoint has almost 13,000 nonprofits across the nation using its services, including religious organizations, Little League Baseball, Pop Warner, Boys and Girls Clubs and Big Brothers Big Sisters.*

*More than 700 of its clients are camps and conference centers, including Camp Fire USA and the United States Space Camp.*

- **For more information** on background screening services, go to [www.churchmutual.com](http://www.churchmutual.com), click on Safety Resources and select Background Screening.

### **Risk Reporter: What percentage of nonprofits located in the United States perform background screening?**

**Whitford:** Among religious congregations providing social service outreach projects using volunteers, only 29 percent indicate that they have adopted screening practices to a large degree.

We find this percentage terrifyingly low. The exploding growth of nonprofit organizations brings with it an alarming opportunity for volunteers with criminal records to have direct contact with children.

### **Risk Reporter: What are you finding through the screenings?**

**Whitford:** An internal audit of 1.6 million background screens conducted over a three-year period by ChoicePoint indicated:

- Every six minutes, a convicted criminal tries to attain a position at a nonprofit organization.
- Every 43 hours, at least one convicted sex offender tries to attain a position at a youth-oriented nonprofit organization.

Further, in a review of applicants for a large national youth-serving organization of approximately 1.03 million screened:

- 121,392 (12 percent) had criminal records.
- 2,031 of those records were drug-related convictions.
- 740 were sex-related convictions.
- 153 were murder convictions.

### **Risk Reporter: Which checks are most important for camps and conference centers?**

**Whitford:** The most important are the criminal background checks, which include national, regional and state database searches. You should also include a National Sex Offender Registry search.

Today, a National Criminal File search is easy and only costs as low as \$5 per screen. The results can be returned in minutes.

### **Risk Reporter: Isn't a local background check good enough?**

**Whitford:** Let me bring you in on a little secret about background checks that criminals and predators know—many of the screens conducted today are limited in scope, often only including a local, county or state jurisdiction.

That's why criminals stay on the move. They have figured out how to stay one step ahead of the screening process.

The good news is that technology has provided the tools nonprofits need to effectively and efficiently protect themselves and those they serve.

Now, camp leaders can stay one step ahead of them through a national criminal background search.

They can run, but it's much harder to hide.