

2010 Summer Camp Facility Tips

Punch List – Here’s a partial list of things worth a “double check” (created from my *own* stays at camps this time of year!):

- Check **every** shower head for good flow – (they may have gotten clogged over the winter but no-one complained.) New shower heads are only \$8; don’t be stingy (see more below). And dip them on a regular basis in CLR or similar to keep them clear.
- Add coat pegs and a shelf next to each shower. Thick, short, wood dowels won’t break off and won’t skewer anyone. (If it was you, where would you hang *your* towel or sit to dry your feet? A \$6 resin stack chair will do for that).
- Knock down all those spider-webs on the outsides of your buildings. Then keep after them
- Put up new archery targets (big ones).
- New nets on the basketball hoops.
- Replace missing light bulbs. Try spiral, yellow “Bug Lights” in outdoor fixtures. Easy on the eyes at night, and cut down on bug messes.
- Bleach your bathrooms to start mildew-free (see more below).
- Give your maintenance team some new staff shirts and name tags. (For guests to love your staff, they have to know who they are.) ***“Clothes Make the Man. Naked people have little or no influence on society.”*** – Mark Twain.

Improve Your Showers – Why? When kids and staff start the day with a gross experience, it’s hard to shake it off.

- Do you still have those nasty “water saving” shower heads that look like a pressure-washer? The worst thing about them is the ice-cold mist of water they create around the edges. These are 30-year-old technology. What you want is a 2gpm flow head with the “self cleaning” grey rubber nipples (available everywhere for as little as \$8). If they begin to clog you just rub your hand over the rubber nibs and the clogs clean out. And they feel great.
- Mildew must be attacked by your staff. It’s easy, just spray it with a 1:4 solution of bleach (Clorox) and water. A garden sprayer works great. Hit everywhere in the shower where mold and mildew grows, INCLUDING the inside of the shower curtain. But open the windows and doors because you need it to air out for 30 minutes before. And NEVER store ammonia anywhere near your bleach (in fact I’d avoid it all together) because accidentally mixing the two can be fatal.

Flag It – Here’s my annual push to make your camp look welcoming on opening day. “Welcome” flags for your front gate, “Open” flags for your trading post, used-car-lot pennant strings to liven up check-in, and some 2’x3’ pennant flags (in “character colors” for Y camps, for instance)...quick and inexpensive ways to make your camp look fresh and welcoming. One good source: <http://www.carrot-top.com/Advertising-Flags.aspx> and <http://www.carrot-top.com/Banners-Pennant-Strings.aspx>

“Caution: Future World and Community Leaders at Work and Play” --

Have you seen that sign? You can buy one fast at:

[http://shop.ssgecom.com/nec\(cz1TSUQIM2FBTK9OJTNhU1NHUFJEX1BSRF8wMyUzYUVIbExrZmttLWV3eHc0SEF3YnB3di14ZmlOZXlaVTZiRWRsdWVtZ0ctQVRU\)/nec/~f1NUQVRFPTI3Mzg4LjAwNC4wMy4wMg==?g_sel_sitemid\[1\]=M1MO240&~okcode\[1\]=PIDET](http://shop.ssgecom.com/nec(cz1TSUQIM2FBTK9OJTNhU1NHUFJEX1BSRF8wMyUzYUVIbExrZmttLWV3eHc0SEF3YnB3di14ZmlOZXlaVTZiRWRsdWVtZ0ctQVRU)/nec/~f1NUQVRFPTI3Mzg4LjAwNC4wMy4wMg==?g_sel_sitemid[1]=M1MO240&~okcode[1]=PIDET) Or get one made at

your local sign shop (there’s no copyright: it was first created by Dave Wright at Camp Tecumseh 25 years ago!)



Your Well Water Stink Like Rotten Eggs? – The reason is often in your hot water tank. To keep tanks from rusting out they come with a “sacrificial anode,” a long rod that’s screwed down into the tank that’s made of a material like magnesium that dissolves first so the steel in the tank doesn’t. But hard well water reacts with it and creates that horrible smell. This article tells you exactly how to fix it with an easy-to-get replacement anode that doesn’t stink.

<http://www.waterheaterrescue.com/pages/WHRpages/English/Longevity/water-heater-anodes.html>

Real Quick Bathroom Makeover – How do your camp shower-rooms look? Steve Heiny at Flat Rock River Camp (Indianapolis YMCA) had some pretty sad looking bathrooms, even with a new coat of white paint and lots of white FRP (the crinkly “Fiberglass Reinforced Panels”). He went to Walmart (they’re too far out in the boonies to have a Bed, Bath & Beyond) and got some beautifully colored shower curtains and matching window curtains. Amazing how they brightened up the place!

Torn Window Screens – Ever lie awake at night and hear one mosquito flying near your head? It drives you absolutely insane. Now imagine being a parent on check-in day that sees a hole in the window screen in their child’s cabin. Everything you’ve been saying about how your staff “does everything with your child’s safety in mind” has just been proven untrue.

Replacing Torn Screens – I really hate window screen stapled in place. It rips easier, looks shabby unless covered with a trim board, but replacing those screens get harder each time you do it. Staples and torn screen shreds piling up under that trim board (because nobody ever pulls every old staple before they put the new screens in, am I right?) Here are a couple ideas I picked up from trial and error over the years:

You can order custom-made aluminum-channel window screens really inexpensively if you buy a *lot* of them at once. You can install them the conventional way with some type of thumb-tabs to make them easy to remove, but I’ve found they take a beating and often get knocked out or “leak” mosquitoes around the edges. Here’s the clever solution: carefully drill holes through the aluminum channel of the screens and just screw them to the window trim (with at least 3 screws per side). Then when you need to replace the screen, just replace the fabric right in place! Yank out the spline cord, temporarily tack up new screen fabric and roll in new spline. Trim. Whole process less than 10 minutes and perfect every time! Watch it here:

<http://www.marthastewart.com/photogallery/how-to-repair-window-screens>

(You can make your own *wood* screen frames by cutting a spline-channel with a table saw. Works the same way, and you can use cedar or pressure-treated pine.)

Deeply Disturbing ... Potholes in Your Entry Road! – Don't wait, fill them now. Here's the secret to a smooth, durable patch: Go to your home improvement warehouse and pick up bags of "cold-patch" or "driveway patch" for asphalt repair. Looks just like asphalt in a bag like concrete mix, but it sets up by drying out instead of cooling off. There's a trick the pros know that you don't know: rent a "vibrating plate compactor" at your local rental store. The smallest one should do, probably about \$45 for 4 hours. Overfill the pothole by an inch or more, and then run the compactor over it 'till it's "smooth as a baby's bottom!"

The Real Facts on Norovirus – the "cruise ship virus" affects more camps every summer. Almost a dozen closed for a session or more last summer in New York state alone. Here's the link to the CDC's easy-to-understand information. It's spread primarily by people not washing their hands, especially before meals. Your foodservice, maintenance, and counseling staff should learn this just as they learn about blood-borne pathogens:
<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/revb/gastro/norovirus.htm> Yes, having kids wash their hands *right* before every meal is the best defense, but you couldn't possibly have that many sinks, could you? So be sure that every handle and door-knob and push-plate into the dining hall and restrooms is disinfected just before every meal, and *every* camper and counselor uses an alcohol hand sanitizer right before serving and eating.

Does Purell® Work? – A quick search on Google® for "Alcohol Hand Sanitizer Norovirus" yields the positive research results on using hand sanitizers like Purell before meals (yes, it works), and answers to almost any question you might get from staff and parents.

"Cleanup on Isle Five" – A poster to print out on how to sanitize surfaces:
<http://www.epi.hss.state.ak.us/id/dod/norovirus/sanitize.pdf>

Don't Paint Yet – This product is as close to a miracle as I've seen in the grocery store. "Mr. Clean Eraser" can clean scuff marks, squished mosquitoes, and molding root-beer splatter off your cabin or dining hall walls without harming the paint. And ANYONE can do it (unlike painting).

"My Boss Wants a Gaga Court" – Of course she does. It's the most popular camp game *ever*. And it's quick to build. Plans are at <http://www.garyforster.com/library.php> under "Camper Return Rates: Friendships."

Ask the Kids -- One of the coolest things I ever saw was a cabin activity where the campers were asked to design their ideal camp from the ground up. Kids would brainstorm first with the director, talking about the "stuff" they wanted. Then each camper drew one or more of the "things" on to 8 ½ x 11" sheets of paper. Finally the group arranged the facilities and activity areas on a roll of newsprint into a "site map" and filled in the water, paths, etc. (An incredible rainy-day activity).

For instance, camp Kitaki had their kids meet with the architect who was designing their new bath-house. The kids' number one request? "Have the toilets be the self-flushing kind like at the airport" (and you know why!) The architect did a fine job with the design, but when it was submitted for bids the camp director Chris Klingenberg noticed that regular toilet valves had been specified. The architect's response: "I didn't think the kids were serious." The director made sure the kids were listened to!

Healthy Grass Prevents Injuries – We had a turf expert at the camp maintenance conference last year who went into depth (literally) on the right and wrong ways to get more durable, drought-resistant grass around camp.

Turns out most of us do five things wrong; (blame your dad for teaching you bad habits):

First, we don't cut the grass often enough. You've heard never to cut more than the third of the length of the grass (So if you want 2" grass you have to cut it at 3"). "What happens when I let it go to 7 inches before I cut 5 inches off? It's still 2 inches when I'm done." But it puts the plant into such shock that it stops replacing roots and growing new blades, so it's much easier damaged beyond repair.

Mistake number two, we use high-nitrogen (that's the first number on the bag) to "green up" the lawn. That stuff works like steroids and makes the blades grow incredibly fast (which makes it IMPOSSIBLE to keep up with the mowing at 1/3 of the length), and it does nothing to help root growth.

Number three? Sharpen your mower's blades after every 10 hours of use. Dull blades rip and tear the grass, letting it lose moisture as the rough ends brown.

When we do cut the grass, we often cut it too short. The shorter the blades, the shorter the roots they can support, so if you cut it down to 1" high, you'll get only an inch or less of roots, and it will dry out and die. Keep it at 2 ½ or 3" and you get roots down deep to the cooler, moister soil.

Finally, dad took the hose and gave the lawn a quick watering, or moved the sprinkler around often. That encourages root growth only at the surface and not down deep (again, the roots get damaged too easily when they're short and the plants dry out too quickly). If you're going to water (and doing that once or at most twice a week is a very good thing), make sure your sprinklers are on long enough to soak the soil down past the roots; and the roots will grow down deep because it stays moist longer there.

"But there's No Way I've got time for all of this!" You don't need this level of care everywhere, just in **the places kids actually play on the grass**. Good turf isn't just important for looks, it's the primary safety equipment when kids are playing field games. It's important to take care of it for risk management reasons. That should get you a few more dollars each year to do another thing more useful than fertilizer: core-aeration every spring and fall. Soil gets compacted from foot and vehicle traffic, which chokes off new growth. Either renting the machine for a day or paying a service to plug your most important fields will help protect new root growth, let water get down deeper, and even let in seed you throw on top. Got a real problem area? The golf courses spread sand after they've plugged so that twice a year they're improving the sand/soil ratio and the aeration does long-term good, too.

What's in a Name? A reason for fantasy and adventure! The Southington/Cheshire CT YMCA's Sloper Day Camp knows the values of naming places. One end of their small canoeing lake is "Turtle's Paradise, where turtles go on vacation!" They have a hillside where kids can dig for small quartz crystals called "The Crystal Mine," (including a cool sign), and their lookout/treehouse platform across the lake is called "Pirate Point." They even have a "Wiffle-Ball Stadium" complete with a "Green Monster" outfield wall (can you tell the Red Sox are the local favorites?) for kids to hit home-runs over. Now *that's* magical.

No Time to Make Your Own Signs? – Good looking, matching signs are probably the fastest (even cheapest) way to make your whole camp look safer and more organized. Not just a few; replace all but your “historic” ones. I wouldn’t hesitate using an “Instant Sign” shop to create cut-vinyl letter signs. If you don’t already have a “camp color pallet,” I’d go with white letters on a brown background (a “national park” look) on sturdy aluminum (or corrugated plastic sign stock if you can’t afford a long-term solution now). They can even use “Scotchlite” film for the letters so they’re reflective at night. The dimmest flashlight and campers can still find their cabins!

“Don’t let the bed-bugs bite!”—Time magazine ran a story that bedbugs were becoming more common. At least a dozen camps have already reported big problems with the little critters this year. The important thing for us all to know is that they jump their host and set up housekeeping in our cabins, lay eggs, and a new batch hatches in 4 to 12 days to hunt for a “blood feast” to reproduce again. You must take aggressive action early, or they will go home with your campers, too. And then you can’t *imagine* the wrath!

Cookin’ dem Bugs – Heat is the most effective way to eradicate bed bugs, and many exterminators don’t offer it. First, you can kill anything in campers’ bedding and clothes by putting them loosely in black garbage bags, tying them shut and placing them in direct sun for a couple of hours. **BUY THE BAGS NOW** and have them ready. Cooking your cabins is the easiest way to get rid of the bugs AND the eggs. Get help in doing it safely. (Using non-vented portable heaters will make your cabins CO and CO2 deathtraps. Maybe you’ve got a volunteer fire department that would like practice with their air tanks and infrared temperature equipment!) Do some web homework. You’ll find people who swear by a homeowners-grade product by “HotShots” for fumigating rooms and how to use it against bedbugs hiding in your wall trim and bunk joints

Fun at Home Tonight – Here’s a set of fun games for camp property managers, maintenance, and construction staff. It lets you play “Building Inspector” and try to spot defects and omissions. Cool! <http://www.finehomebuilding.com/pages/the-inspector-seventeen.asp>



“Just shoot me!” (with Brush Killer!)



Camp Hazen (CT) has THE coolest Buddy Board!