

# Law mandates training for camp workers

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**By George Henson**

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Churches throughout Texas are required to make extra preparations for summer camps this year, as a new state law outlining training for adults who work with children and teen-agers goes into effect June 1.

The new law requires every adult—paid or volunteer—who is in contact with children at camp to undergo training focused on sexual abuse and child molestation. At the end of the training, each adult worker must take a written test to demonstrate understanding of the material.

State law already requires criminal background checks of adults who have contact with children at camp. A sex-offender background check also is required. The checks can be done by going to the website <https://records.txdps.state.tx.us/>. The fee for criminal background checks is a little more than \$3 each. Sex offender background checks are free.

The Texas Baptist Camp Managers Association and the staff of the Baptist General Convention of Texas worked together to develop curriculum to meet state requirements for the training, including a test. The curriculum is

available on a DVD distributed by camp managers to churches that will attend camp this summer.

The curriculum is mandated to include “the definition and effects of sexual abuse and child molestation; the typical behavior and methods of operation of child molesters and sex offenders that put children at risk; the warning signs and symptoms associated with sexual abuse or child molestation, recognition of signs and symptoms and recommended methods of intervening and reporting suspected abuse; and the recommended rules and procedures for youth camps to implement to address, reduce, prevent and report suspected sexual abuse and child molestation.”

All workers 18 years old or older are required to complete the training.

Tom Leamon, director of Camp Chaparral Baptist Assembly in Iowa Park and president of the Texas Baptist Camp Managers Association, said the new law has its pros and cons.

“It’s good in one sense, because anything that goes toward safeguarding the well-being of our children is positive, but it is going to be a burden in implementation,” he said.

As the licensed party, the camps are responsible for making sure workers complete the training stipulated in the law.

The camps will be required to ask churches for documentation on all volunteer workers at the time they arrive and keep those records on file.

Since it sometimes happens that the planned adult worker cannot attend and a last-minute substitute has to be found, Leamon said Camp Chaparral will be prepared to lead a course for anyone who could not receive the training before arrival. Churches should check to see if on-site training will be available at the camp they plan to attend, Leamon advised.

Currently, training is not required for camps such as Super Summer held on college or university campuses. Some officials believe this immunity for colleges and universities will be lost in the next legislative session.

The intent of the law is positive, Leamon said in a statement posted on the camp's website.

"The best way to deter abuse from happening at our camps is to develop an environment that puts the offender, rather than the child, at risk. An adequate screening process, proper supervision and accountability will discourage this type of offender."

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