

What You Need to Know If You Run A SUMMER RIDING PROGRAM

As with just about anything one chooses to operate, there are certain standards that must be met if you plan to sell your services to the general community, and the same is true for summer riding programs. Over the years at *The Equi-ery*, we have discovered that many of our readers and advertisers were uncertain if a summer program would be considered a camp, and they were uncertain about researching the definition of a camp. So, in order to help our advertisers and readers, we decided to research this for ourselves and for you, to find out if and when riding programs qualify as summer camps.

By Any Other Name, A Camp Is Still A Camp

Sometimes a riding program is a riding program, and sometimes a riding program is a camp. If your program meets the definition of a camp, it is a camp, and what you call it is irrelevant. And camps are regulated by the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, by Title 10, Subtitle 16 under certification for youth day camps.

Do you meet this definition for camp? A "youth camp" means any kind of camp that accommodates seven or more campers who are unrelated to the youth camp operator and provides primarily recreational activities or has a substantial recreational component," and a "day camp" is defined as a youth (under the age of 18) camp that "is operated for less than 24 hours a day; is conducted for at least 7 days during a 3 week or less period; provides three or more recreational activities or any one specialized activity or program including...[you got it]...horseback riding.

If your riding program falls within these parameters, then you need to be certified, because the law is "An operator of a youth camp shall obtain an annual youth camp certification issued by the Department, and an operator may not operate a youth camp...unless the operator has obtained a youth camp certificate from the Department."

Now—The Good News

If you are running a professional operation, it shouldn't be that

difficult to obtain certification.

First of all, contact the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene at the Division of Community Services, Office of Food Protection and Consumer Health Services, 6 St. Paul St., Ste. 1301, Baltimore, MD 21202; 410-767-8417 (you would never have found it in the phone book), and request the applications and a copy of the regulations mentioned above. After you complete your applications and submit your fee of \$75 (\$100 residential), the department will send out an inspector to review your program to insure that it meets regulations.

The regulations outline the various procedures or programs required for certification, including a medical program, employees properly certified in CPR and first aid by a national organization, access to a professional health care supervisor or consultant, medical logs, reports and forms, personal health records, immunization requirements, health treatment area, and procedures for medical emergencies, etc.

The regulations cover various basic facility requirements related to food service or food storage (i.e. if kids bring their own lunches), water, sewage disposal, toilet or privy facilities, and hand washing facilities, in addition to sleeping and bathing facilities in overnight camps, as well as certain maintenance programs for insect and rodents, rabies, fire and other hazards.

Requirements are more precise for summer programs that offer specialized activities, such as swimming, riflery, archery, and of course, horseback riding. For horseback riding, the regulations are as follows:

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A. Procedures

An operator shall ensure that:

- (1) A competent riding instructor determines each camper's riding experience and level of skill before assigning horses and deciding whether the camper rides in a ring or on a trail;
- (2) Protective headgear containing the insignia of the United States Pony Club* or other protective headgear generally accepted as providing

a similar or equivalent level of equestrian safety is worn at all times;

- (3) A rider wears shoes with heels or uses closed stirrups; and
- (4) All horses are healthy and well cared for.

B. Staff

An operator shall ensure that:

- (1) A director is present at the camp during the hours of operation
- (2) At each horseback riding activity are an instructor who possesses the training and experience as defined in Regulation .03B(12) and at least one additional staff individual per 10 riders or fewer; and
- (3) An instructor is assigned for every 10 riders or fewer for each trail excursion and at least two staff individuals accompany an excursion.

*The United States Pony Club no longer certifies helmets, look for the ASTM/SEI label when selecting helmets. -ed.

That's it! The regulations define the required director and instructor [.03B(12)] as follows:

"Director: an individual or the individual's designee who in either case is at least 23 years old, possesses at least 24 weeks of previous administrative or supervisory experience in camping or some other equivalent activity involving children, and who the primary overall responsibility of the administration of camp program operations and support services.

Instructor: an individual who has documented experience indicating knowledge and skill in teaching and supervision specific to the activity conducted, is at least 18 years old, and possesses written proof of formal training and experience in that activity, such as an instructor's certificate, a transcript, a certificate of proficiency, or a letter of reference from a national organization, school or certified instructor."

There are many programs through which you can find certified instructors, and some of those are listed below. Some local riding programs organize certification clinics and invite a national accredited organization to attend. Because many riding stables recruit their summer instructors from their year round lesson students, many of those have institut-

ed in-house certification programs by establishing an instructors program for interested students.

An experienced, certified instructor can then qualify as a director.

The bottom line is if you run any sort of summer riding program, you need to be certified. The good news is it is not an overwhelming process.

For information on locating qualified instructors or establishing accreditation programs of your own, contact the equestrian and animal husbandry programs at your local college or university, or contact:

■ American Riding Instructor Association

Phone 239-948-3232; fax 239-948-5053; aria@riding-instructor.com; www.riding-instructor.com

■ CHA (Certified Horsemanship Association)

Phone 800-399-0138; fax 903-509-2474; www.cha-ahse.org

■ Horsemanship Safety Assn.

Phone 863-465-0289 or 800-798-8106; fax 863-699-5577; e-mail HSAnews@juno.com; www.horsesafety.org

■ American Association of Horsemanship Safety, Inc.

Phone 512-488-2220; fax 512-488-2319; e-mail jzdawson@aol.com; www.law.utexas.edu/dawson/caution:horses

■ United States Pony Clubs, Inc.

Phone 859-254-PONY; fax 859-233-4652; uspc@ponyclub.org; www.ponyclub.org

Also, many of the show and sport organizations, such as the United States Dressage Association, have launched instructor certification programs, so check into these.

And, as a final note, to all you aspiring instructors: check out these certification programs! There is a big demand for certified instructors for summer riding camps, and there aren't enough certified instructors out there—so get certified and increase your job opportunities!!