



Southern Conference of the United Church of Christ
Eastern North Carolina Association
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Safe Church
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Frequently Asked Questions on "Safe Church" policies from the United Church of Christ Insurance Board and compiled by Eastern NC Association to explain the necessity for implementing child protection management and background screening procedures.

Q: Why should we adopt an abuse prevention or "Safe Church" policy?

A: In addition to protecting vulnerable individuals, it helps reduce the organization's potential exposure to legal liability. It may also facilitate obtaining relevant insurance coverage.

Q: When do abuse prevention policies need to be in place?

A: As soon as possible, but no later than early November 2006.

Q: Why is the UCC moving so quickly to implement Safe Church policies?

A: Because of recent liability insurance changes, the UCC Insurance Board felt it was important that churches review existing child protection management and background screening procedures. Depending on the status of your church's current procedures, you may need to modify or adopt procedures in order to maintain eligibility for the Abusive Acts Liability Coverage.

Q: Can we use sample "Safe Church" policies provided by the UCC or ENCA?

A: Yes, if you do not have a policy in place, use samples immediately on an interim basis while you develop a more comprehensive policy. Those with youth programs, schools or daycare operations should develop a more comprehensive policy as soon as possible.

Q: What happens if we do not implement a policy at the local level?

A: The most important issue is that if your church does not develop and follow such a policy, church members and other participants in church programs would be at greater risk of abuse and harassment. However, if for whatever reason your church doesn't implement a policy, it is likely at some point that you would lose eligibility for the abusive acts liability coverage. While this would not affect your eligibility for property or general liability coverage with the UCCIB program, loss of the abusive acts liability coverage could be very detrimental to your church in the event of a claim.

Q: Must we do this screening for current employees and volunteers?

A: There is no insurance requirement to check existing workers at present, but it is the prudent thing to do and strongly recommended by the ENCA. Screen all new employees and volunteers working with children, youth, or other vulnerable persons.

Q: What does "screening" typically include?

A: Southern Mutual Church's contract with Intellicorp includes the following: 50 state criminal and sex offender registry search; identify verification (SSN); address history; terrorist and international drug traffickers databases; and county of residence search.

Q: What else should be considered in developing a "comprehensive policy"?

A: Evaluate your needs and current practices. Consider developing a written "code of conduct," with rules and disciplinary process. A manual of procedures for incident reporting and investigation, response procedures and appropriate record keeping is also recommended.

Q: Where do we go for assistance?

A: Contact the ENCA and attend the introductory workshops provided by Southern Mutual. Also, please consult your local legal counsel for advice when implementing formal policies. Useful resources are posted on the web at www.ucc.org/ministries/safe and www.enca-ucc.org/safe.



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Q: Once we have our "Safe Church" policy completed, who should we share it with?

A: Your congregation and all employees, volunteers, directors and trustees, and any other persons representing your organization in any capacity. The process of creating a safe church includes everyone in the congregation. Consider developing a packet of information for visitors, other "friends of the church" and anyone using your facility. Include this as part of your facility safety provisions.

Q: Our church is small and everyone knows each other; do we really need a "Safe Church" policy?

A: Regardless, you will still need to ensure that appropriate management policies, safeguards and oversight provisions are in place, and that proper employment practices are followed, if relevant. Operations with a limited number of programs, participants, and assistants may actually find it easier to administer and control than the larger organizations. If you have the same volunteers on an ongoing basis, record keeping need not be elaborate. Keep the information forms on file and ask for written record updates quarterly. In addition, the sex offender registry should still be checked at least annually.

Q: How often should the policy be reviewed and presented to participants?

A: Once adopted, the policy should be reviewed and updated annually to reflect any program changes or legal developments. There should be an initial orientation and training for all program participants, followed by an annual review and update, as appropriate for your particular situation. You might also have specific guidelines to follow in your conference, region or association, such as "boundary education" repeated periodically.

Q: Will churches need to submit a copy of their "Safe Church" policy for approval?

A: No. Presently there is no insurance requirement to provide a copy of your policy. The ENCA may request copies to be used as examples for other churches.

Q: Must we use a fee-based criminal records check service to do background checking?

A: No. The Southern Mutual Church Insurance Company strongly encourages using Intellicorp. The values of using a professional service are numerous: compliance with Fair Credit Reporting Act; legally defensible results; ensures compliant with state and federal regulations; meets EEOC fair treatment guidelines; confidential; efficient; and consistent. The ENCA is working with both companies to make the process quick, easy and inexpensive for churches.

Q: What is the government website we can use to at no cost to do a registered sex offender check?

A: It is the United States Department of Justice National Sex Offender Public Registry at www.nsopr.gov.

Q: How often should names be checked on the National Sex Offender Public Registry?

A: We recommend checking names quarterly. Check the DOJ's national registry at least annually.

Q: Are we able to ask an applicant if they have been convicted of any crime, not just felony convictions?

A: The law governing permissible inquiries in pre-employment screening varies from state to state. Please consult with your local attorney to make certain that the policy you adopt complies with your state's law, while inquiring about relevant criminal history to the fullest extent permitted by law. This will be covered in the SMC workshop.

To view all of the UCC Insurance Board recommendations visit <http://www.insuranceboard.org>.