



Sauk County Rural Safety Days Camp

County based Rural Safety Days have been around for at least 20 years in some Wisconsin communities. An initiative set by many counties following the Farm Health & Safety Council's annual meeting in 1992, it became a collaborative partnership between UW-Madison, Division of Extension, and county Public Health Departments.

Sauk County's program has reached its 29-year milestone in 2023. Although it has its roots in farm safety, instruction now includes topics pertinent to all children, including internet safety, water safety and wearing seat belts. The National Children's Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety estimates that about every three days, a child dies in an agriculture-related incident, and each day, at least 33 children are injured. During the past decade, youth worker fatalities in agriculture have exceeded all other industries combined.

While safety professionals' deliver short, powerful messages on a wide range of safety topics, one of the key questions asked by any community member might be, "did they get anything out of the day?" Any one of those safety professionals will tell you that if even just one of those 700+ children learned an important safety message that could save their lives, or someone else's, then it was worth it.

Safety Topics



A project of the Safe Kids Sauk County Coalition, The Rural

Safety Days Camp is one way area safety professionals seek to reduce unintentional childhood injuries through strategies of public awareness, education, and community action. The Camp covered safety topics like chemical, fire, insect/plant, electrical, internet/bullying/mental health, gun, farm equipment, small/large animal, water, bike/helmet, and ATV/UTV safety.



While internet safety with some mental health has been a feature for several years, this year anti-bullying and being kind was specifically added as an intentional focus. UW Division of Extension joined the Sheriff's Department in delivering a session on cyber bullying and mental health awareness. This acknowledges the rural mental health challenges being faced locally and statewide. The WI Department of Transportation (DOT) was not able to feature this year due to staff turnover, so the annual seatbelt safety program was unavailable.

The agenda of topics covered during the three days of the Camp are determined through a review of both local and state child death impact statistics. Although a broad range of programming is covered with youth, due to the large number of children being served, the depth of programming is limited. Professionals work hard to address 1-2 take aways for youth that might impact a positive change in their safety behavior for the future.

School Attendance

Within Sauk County there are seven school districts, of which there are 23 public elementary schools and eight private schools. Public Health Sauk County works diligently to sustain participation with all schools. Camp attendance for 2023 was at 750 3rd grade students. New this year, Sauk County saw attendance by homeschool students. Overall, participation in this year's Camp marks a notable increase in youth completing the Rural Safety Days. This demonstrates a renewed commitment to in-person programming related to the health & well-being of our most vulnerable populations.

The time and organization it takes to support students getting to the Camp is a significant commitment for our area schools, specifically their teachers. In addition to making time within the annual school curriculum, many teachers depend on the support of parent chaperones and sometimes special classroom aids to accommodate diverse student needs to support participation. As districts face ongoing challenges with increasing transportation costs, limited availability of working parents, and changing curriculum expectations, both the Rural Safety Days Committee and its education partners will need help from invested community leaders to manage these challenges.

Camp Organization & Talent

Organization A year of ongoing planning and organizing followed by weeks of intensely dedicated coordination make this event possible. Leading the way is *Public Health Sauk County*, facilitating the Camp committee and caretaking the partnerships that sustain this project and many more activities of the coalition. Public Health Nurse, Rebecca Szydowski, is the current Camp Committee chairperson and organizer.

UW-Madison, Division of Extension provides peer support services, through 4-H, and in coordination with area middle & high school FFA programs. Having older youth leaders guiding teachers and students through the Camp and participating in sessions on the day helps model mentorship and connection for young students.

Talent The experienced and dedicated professionals that have been volunteering their time, services, and resources to the Camp over the years, and featured in 2023's Camp program include; *Sauk County Emergency Management, Sauk County Environmental Health, Sauk County Sheriff's Department, Baraboo Police Department, Baraboo Fire Department, Alliant Energy Center, Baraboo Parks & Recreation Center, Sauk County Humane Society, Gericke Farms, Morning Glory Veterinary Care*, and the *WI Department of Natural Resources*. **A full list of presenters is available on [Public Health Sauk County's website](#).**

Those individuals who deliver Camp sessions have done so for many years with great skill. The coalition recognizes the need to work with all represented organizations to encourage more diverse staff engagement so that programming doesn't diminish as staff resources change. **The Rural Safety Days Committee also takes time to gather evaluations from the participating schools post event, to improve the following year's Camp activities.**

Challenges

The *Safe Kids Sauk County* coalition is dedicated to sustaining the Rural Safety Days Camp, however, there are anticipated challenges that will have to be overcome. These are some of the anticipated hurdles being faced by the project moving forward;

- While the project is supported by a generous list of **sponsors**, the rising costs of venue rental, lunch & water for safety presenters that donate 3 full days to educate, safety t-shirts for youth (listing the sponsors), and signage creates concerns for sustainable programming.
- Sauk County at is 85% youth engagement (17 of 20 schools). If schools cannot meet the transportation costs in future, the program may lose impact to some parts of the county. This may start to reflect in youth safety statistics for the County.
- The project is seeing a loss of programs and/or staff commitment (which is a loss of experience to the Camp). The Committee needs sustained commitment by engaged agencies to continue their commitment and to review & revise according to evaluation feedback.
- Sauk County needs a renewed understanding of what Rural Safety Days Camp provides for area children to reinvest in a community wide commitment to supporting this education.

Opportunities

The commitment to **in-person**, often **hands-on experiences** that youth get with safety professionals during this Camp helps contribute to positive behavior change as children grow.

Reducing the incidences of accidental child death in Sauk County is a community priority that can be resourced through;

- ✓ Volunteering (at Camp, or for your local school)
- ✓ Donating (Money, Professional Experience, etc.)
- ✓ Asking a local third grader about their experience, and building on what they learned
- ✓ Sharing this Impact Report with your local leaders