

This Risk Alert contains valuable information. Please share it with your Wright Specialty clients and any other interested educational institutions.



Start the Academic Year Safely

September 2013

The start of the academic year is a good time for staff to review safety issues with a new, fresh perspective. Over the summer, buildings have been cleaned, repairs have been made and in some educational institutions, construction projects were completed. Not surprisingly, many of the accidents (and resulting claims) that occur during the year are a result of slips and falls, or from the use of equipment. Here are several easy-to-follow safety and risk control issues that go hand-in-hand with the start of the year.

Building Security

K-12 Schools:

A single point of entry for visitors during school hours is a good way to control building access. Exterior signage directing visitors to the appropriate entrance, and locking all other perimeter doors will limit unauthorized entry. Visitor security rules which require all visitors to register and sign in, receive (and wear) a badge and be escorted while in the building are low-cost, easy to implement procedures. Also, ensure visitors sign out and turn in their badges when they leave the building. This will aid in having an accurate list of who is in the building in the event of an emergency. When reviewing this process - be sure to review vendor and contractor access, especially to the kitchen and loading dock areas since these doors are often not locked.



Higher Education

The start of the fall semester is a good time to review student and visitor dormitory access. Security rules that are in place provide instruction for visitors when they arrive at a dormitory. Electronic security measures (swipe cards or key pads and emergency alert devices) are of little value if they are bypassed or are inoperable. To be effective, CCTV monitors need to be observed by trained staff. Areas around the campus that require higher levels of security (such as IT server rooms) should be evaluated by security staff or an administrator.

Facility Use

Accidents and claims arising from facility use are usually the result of the activity involved. Falls and collisions between players involved in sports and athletics are the most common type of loss. Besides sound maintenance of facilities, educational institutions must have a permit system, for outside users, where a use of facilities application is required. The form - now on web sites in many cases - should include all applicable rules, board policies and requirements, including indemnification language and insurance requirements.

Building Inspections

A Building inspection can be a good way to identify potentially hazardous conditions or procedures at the start of the academic year. In addition to required state school inspections, and fire marshal visits, safety committee members often conduct surveys as part of their activities. Divide and assign separate areas of a building to different members and conduct a walk-through, with the goal to report hazards to the rest of the committee. A checklist format helps facilitate the process, but members should be encouraged to identify other hazards that are not included in the checklist. Where to start? Conditions to check include:

- **Walking surfaces** should be clear of any trip and fall hazards.
- **Handrails** must be secured.
- **Exterior perimeter lighting** and **cameras** need to be in good working order.
- **Rescue windows** and emergency exit areas should be clearly identified and free of landscaping and vegetation.
- **Areas of assembly** such as gyms, auditoriums and cafeterias may have been painted or had renovations completed over the summer. Ensure all required notices such as occupancy and emergency exit procedures have been reposted and exit signs properly illuminated.
- Make certain that all **construction materials** have been removed and **chemicals** used for summer cleaning are properly stored.
- Do not leave **boiler rooms, electrical rooms** and **electrical panel boxes** unsecured. These areas are often left unlocked during the summer for ease of access, but need to be secured once the building is occupied by students.
- Ensure that **building changes** have not interfered with safety by blocking exits, pull stations, fire extinguishers or exit signs.

Playgrounds

Playgrounds receive a great deal of use over the summer, and an inspection of playground

areas and equipment at this time of year is warranted. Playground equipment needs to be in good working order. With high-usage, surface material - especially loose fill materials like pea gravel, wood chips and sand - can become degraded. Additional material may be needed, or repairs made to unitary surfaces, such as rubber mats or tiles. If you have questions about the playground guidelines, please refer to the *Handbook for Public Playground Safety*, a publication of the Consumer Product Safety Commission (available at www.cpsc.gov).

Classrooms

In the rush to get classrooms ready for the academic year, safety issues can be overlooked. Typical classroom hazards include: rescue windows that are unmarked and/or obstructed; housekeeping, for example, classroom material that is not properly stored; obstructed vision panels; missing fire and tornado shelter exit maps; misuse of electric extension cords; and the use of cooking or heating appliances, which are not be allowed in classrooms.



Noninstructional educational areas also need attention. Signs with governing rules should be posted in shops, labs, weight rooms, pools and other areas to establish a safe tone for the start of the academic year. Ensure all machinery in the shops is anchored to the floor to prevent tip overs and all personal protective equipment is easily available. A general classroom safety checklist is [attached](#) and can be used as a reminder tool for all staff.

Ongoing Construction

If construction projects continue into the academic year, ensure that proper exits from the construction site are being used by contractors and for deliveries. With students and staff back on the grounds, check to see that access to the area under construction is restricted. Students, visitors and staff should not have access to these areas.

Other conditions arising from construction that should be evaluated include:

- Excess offensive odors and noise
- Delivery trucks
- Smoking on school grounds
- Contractors not wearing ID tags
- Proper removal of construction debris
- Changes in traffic patterns
- Unsafe storage of debris
- Unsafe storage of construction material and hazardous chemicals
- Inadequate security



The attached checklist list [General Classroom and Facility Safety Checklist](#) will help ensure another great academic year.

If you have any questions about this subject, or, if you need assistance conducting an assessment, please contact the Wright Specialty Risk Management Department at 516 750-9457.

Sincerely,



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