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# RISKmanager



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# Intervening In Student Altercations

## Can Lead to Work-related Injuries By Kyle Stewart risk control consultant

Injuries associated with staff members intervening in student altercations can result in costly workers' compensation claims due to potential head injuries which often result in a lost time workers' compensation claim.

Aside from the direct costs associated with the workers' compensation claim(s); indirect costs attributed to these loss events include disruption of the learning environment and time devoted to overseeing the claim process.

The primary goal of risk control is to mitigate loss exposure. Start by identifying the root cause of the work-related injury through your internal accident investigation procedure. This type of loss event is

slightly different, as the root cause of the injury can be attributed to student behavior; the "student altercation" required a response from staff, resulting in the work-related injury.

The focus of school entities should be on preventing the act causing the work-related injury—in this case, a student altercation—and providing staff members with appropriate training and procedures to effectively respond to such an incident. Student altercations and similar events can occur throughout the school buildings and grounds, so it is imperative to provide training to all school personnel, including building administrators, professional staff, instructional support and administrative support.

The following preventative measures will not eliminate injuries associated with staff intervening in student altercations; however, each school entity should discuss these preventative measures with all applicable staff members to reduce the severity of injuries associated with this loss event.

- **Provide annual behavioral crisis safety training** to all staff members who interact with students; this includes professional staff, instructional support staff, building administrators, hallway/playground monitors, front office staff, etc.
- If not already implemented, develop in consultation with your school entity's solicitor **a written protocol outlining actions staff members should initiate in the event of a student altercation** (i.e., prohibiting staff intervention, requiring staff to intervene and/or identifying specific personnel who are to intervene).
  - o In developing a written protocol pertaining to staff intervening, consider the safety of students, staff members and potential liability concerns.
- **Review your school entity's internal response procedures** and communicate what action/responsibility is delegated to applicable staff members.
  - o Clarify misconceptions regarding which staff should and/or should not intervene in student altercations in accordance with your internal protocols.
- Conduct thorough investigations to **document the incident and involve applicable staff members** to further discuss potential triggers that cause student altercations to escalate.
  - o Are the incidents occurring at specific times/locations? Consider work task modifications such as:
    - Increasing the number of staff members present in the area to help identify and diffuse before physical altercations begin.
    - Modifying existing staff members' response procedures.
    - Altering travel routes/activities to lessen congestion in hallways.
    - Providing additional training on industry accepted techniques to intervene in student altercations.
- **Procedural considerations:**
  - o Educate staff to recognize the warning signs (i.e., verbal exchanges, audience gathering, posturing, etc.) that a student altercation may be escalating and to intervene with verbal de-escalation techniques.
  - o Alert and request assistance of properly trained staff members prior to attempting to diffuse/de-escalate the situation alone.
  - o Assess the altercation to identify appropriate course of action. Do not immediately attempt to intervene without considering the following:
    - Size and quantity of participants engaged in the altercation and surrounding area.
    - Location of the altercation and ability to escape should the altercation turn against the staff members.
  - o Avoid jumping in the middle of the altercation; greater risk of being struck by a punch/strike intended for the individuals fighting; instead, attempt to diffuse the altercation from the perimeter.
    - Watch your backside and avoid turning your back once the involved students have been separated; continually scan the area.
  - o Conduct walk-through drills to simulate staff response actions should intervention in a student altercation be required.
  - o Explore techniques through a training curriculum specific to intervening in student altercations/crowd control; consult with your school entity's school resource officer and/or local law enforcement agency.





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# Information Technology Equipment Rooms

*By Jake Ruziecki  
risk control consultant*

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Even though most of us use computers for several hours each day, it is easy to forget where many of your infrastructure's information and programs are stored. Information technology (IT) equipment rooms may house servers with critical programs, records and information related to school district operations.

Due to the unique nature of these IT equipment areas, it is important not only to protect the equipment and data, but also to protect the rest of the building and its occupants from IT equipment hazards.

In educational facilities, IT equipment rooms are commonly referred to as server rooms where server racks may operate up to 30 kW per rack. To put that amount of energy into perspective, a Tesla Model S 60D automobile will use 32kWh to travel 100 miles.

With the guidance of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 75 Standard for Fire Protection of Information Technology Equipment, your existing IT equipment, IT areas and IT equipment rooms can be assessed for site-specific fire risks and hazards. This standard will also evaluate the business continuity planning and disaster restoration capabilities of the IT equipment specific to your site. The importance of protecting your digital and physical property is why an individual, site-specific, fire risk analysis must be completed for each IT area. Each facility is unique and not all applications would benefit from a one-size-fits-all approach to fire protection.

### **When performing a fire risk analysis, the following factors must be considered:**

- Fire threat to facility occupants, the general public and emergency responders.
- Exposed property from a fire occurring at the facility, adjacent to or within IT equipment areas.
- The importance of the continuity of data being stored or processed by the IT equipment. (Determine whether the documents are important records, master records or vital records.)
- Methods and equipment employed as part of a business continuity plan that allow data and services to remain viable or be restored in a timely manner during or after an event.

The fire risk assessment shall be completed and documented, and must include all the risk management considerations outlined in NFPA 75 in order to be acceptable for the authority having jurisdiction, usually your local building and fire code officials.

## **Implementation, training and annual re-evaluation should be completed to keep the fire risk analysis documentation up to date and staff prepared for a loss producing event.**

While fires are the least predictable cause of damage to IT equipment areas, they also pose the greatest potential for loss. This is why NFPA 75 requires IT equipment rooms and areas in sprinklered buildings to be equipped with an automatic sprinkler system, separately valved from other sprinkler systems in the building. In a non-sprinklered building, IT equipment rooms and areas shall be provided with one or more automatic fire suppression systems. Water-based sprinkler systems are acceptable, but not the best option due to the potential for damage to the electrical equipment in the event of a fire or unintentional deployment. Consider installing an additional gaseous or clean agent fire suppression system in place of or in addition to the water-based system.

The requirement for a fire protection system in a non-sprinklered building is not the same in each area. Refer back to the fire risk assessment and check with local code officials to see what is required for your specific operation.

As mentioned earlier, fire protection is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Seek additional guidance from experienced third parties including local codes officials, local fire protection contractors or your assigned risk control consultant who can provide expertise in the evaluation and effectiveness of current fire protection efforts.





# THE TRIPLE THREAT:

## Three Accident Types In Today's Schools and How You Can Prevent Them

By Mark Nease, risk control consultant

The triple threat to staff in today's schools include slips/trips/falls, strain injuries and struck-by injuries. Take some time to consider these accident types at your school and how you can prevent a mishap involving them.

### Slips/Trips/Falls

Slips/trips/falls are often the most frequent type of accident in today's schools. Hazards can exist at any given time, from when staff enter their schools in the morning to when they exit at the end of the workday.

#### Common slip/trip/fall hazards at school buildings include:

- Placement of electrical cords.
- Debris on the floor.
- Improper rugs in classrooms (that can bunch up).
- Frayed or curled edges on mats/carpet.
- Missing or broken step edge covers.
- Uneven walking surfaces.
- Wet or slippery walking surfaces.

#### What can you do to reduce the risk of slip/trip/fall injuries at your school?

Always focus on eliminating the hazard. Once you eliminate the hazard, you no longer need to rely on people to use their judgment to avoid a mishap. An example of an "elimination" control could include using battery-operated tools instead of corded tools to eliminate electrical cord trip hazards.

Other options include administrative controls and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) controls. Once you start using administrative controls (such as work protocols, rules, etc.) and PPE controls, you must rely on people to use their good judgment to work safely. Because of their potential fallacies, PPE controls are your last line of defense in mitigating a hazard.

## Slip/trip/fall hazards relating to individuals could include:

- Distracted walking.
- Carrying a load that limits vision.
- Standing on unstable objects.
- Use of improper footwear for conditions.
- Illness or side effect of medications.
- Stress and fatigue.

Your safety committee should consider implementing protocols to help protect employees from human-related actions that can result in a mishap. One thing to consider with the implementation of rules/protocols is that if they are not enforced, they may not be effective.

## Strains

Strain injuries are often the most severe type of accident in today's schools. Strain injuries can occur due to improper lifting, improper body mechanics and improper posture.

### Strain injury controls include:

- Practicing the use of material handling equipment.
- Providing training to staff on body mechanics and material handling techniques.
- Purchasing supplies that weigh less per container.
- Minimizing the weight of garbage by ordering garbage liners with a lower capacity.
- Scheduling work so a buddy system can be utilized. Allow co-workers to work together to perform team lifts.
- Encouraging staff to S-T-R-E-T-C-H. Stretching prepares the body for physical activity.

## Struck-by injuries

Staff being struck by students can be a high frequency and/or a high severity type of injury in today's schools. Some preventive tips to consider include:

- Participate in behavioral-based safety (crisis) training, including passive restraint and de-escalation techniques.
- Understand common behaviors of students who may act out emotionally so that you can be prepared to safely deliver instruction.
- Utilize physical controls such as bite guards/Kevlar sleeves for bite protection.
- Implement and train staff on protocols to follow in responding to student disturbances.
- Utilize school resource officers for student disturbances.
- Take appropriate enforcement action in response to student disturbances, for those involved as well as student onlookers/spectators.

**Slip/trip/fall injuries, strain injuries and struck-by student injuries are three prominent accident types in today's schools. Steps can be taken to reduce the risk of these accident types, however each employee is ultimately responsible for his/her own safety. Consider how you can play a part each day in on-the-job safety.**



# RISK by VOCATION

*By Derek Neubauer, risk control consultant*

Vocational programs vary from school to school; some have vocational education as their primary purpose while others offer them as electives. Below are some tips, grouped according to the vocational programs in which the situations would most likely arise.

These responsibilities are shared by students, administrators, teachers and maintenance personnel. Your school may not have all these issues, but you most likely have some of them. So, make sure all these basic safety tips are being addressed.





## **All vocational shops, family/consumer sciences, art rooms and maintenance areas:**

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- Ensure all flammables are stored in an approved cabinet.
- All gasoline should be stored in an approved safety gas can.
- Any rag that encounters flammable liquids should be disposed of in an approved waste can that is emptied at the end of the day.
- All fire extinguishers should be visually inspected every month, inspected annually by a certified outside agency and have a 6-year internal examination and a 12-year hydrostatic test. All non-rechargeable fire extinguishers should be taken out of service no later than 12 years after their manufacture date.
- Any electrical outlets within six feet of a water source (including a masonry saw) should be equipped with Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter protection, either on the outlets themselves, as part of a series, or within the electrical panel.
- Hearing protection and eye protection should always be provided for use in any shop.
- Compressed air should not be used to clean clothing.
- A grinder should be equipped with a rest that is no more than 1/8 inch away from the grinding wheel. It takes about a minute to fix the wheel or the rest, and less than a second to severely damage a finger or hand!
- Housekeeping should be a focus of all shops. All material should be picked up at the end of class, clear working areas should be provided around all equipment, all wood/metal storage should be kept with clear pathways, including extension cords used for portable work.

- All electrical panel, sprinkler control and any other areas where emergency maintenance may be required should always have at least a three-foot clearance.
- All emergency shut-off buttons should be clearly marked and have a clear pathway to them.

## **Auto body/mechanics:**

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- Paint booths, paint hoods and kitchen hoods with ANSUL systems should be inspected by an outside agency semi-annually.
- All automotive vehicle lifts and engine hoists should be inspected by a certified installer or manufacturer at least annually.

## **Welding, HVAC, automotive and plumbing:**

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- Oxygen and fuel gas cylinders (most popular being acetylene) should not be stored within 20 feet of each other, unless separated by a five-foot high masonry wall.
- All compressed gas cylinders should be stored in an upright position and secured by a chain—even empties!
- Mechanical ventilation should be provided for all welding operations, whether in a booth or portable.
- Weld curtains should be provided for all welding booths to reduce “weld flash” eye injuries.

## **Wood shops, construction trades, carpentry and cabinetmaking:**

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- All radial arm saws should be equipped with an automatic return device that brings the blade back to the starting position in a slow smooth fashion.
- All wood lathes should be equipped with a canopy guard.
- A canopy guard should always be provided for the table saw blade.



# ENLIGHTENED SAFETY:

## Proper Lighting in the Workplace

By Edgar Boord, risk control consultant

Have you ever rushed into a basement or attic to find that tool or item you need, only to stub your big toe or bang your head on a low-hanging beam? Areas such as these are often used for excess storage, leading to additional clutter. They also are often poorly lit, making it difficult to navigate the clutter waiting to be painfully kicked. In cases such as this, storage can be part of the issue, but **the inability to see where you are going can greatly increase the hazards that may exist** as well. This issue also translates to various areas of the workplace and can affect more than just your ability to see where you are walking.

Inadequate lighting can lead to not only slips/trips/falls, but employees can also be exposed to other existing hazards such as sharp edges, protruding obstacles, or running equipment and pinch point hazards. A great way to identify poorly lit areas is to ask the people who work there, especially those that work second or later shifts. Individuals who work after school hours when it begins to get dark may be more aware of the areas where it can be difficult to see. Areas to focus on may be lower level spaces such as **boiler/mechanical rooms, storage spaces and equipment/maintenance garages**. In addition, **building exteriors** should also be checked to make certain employees can see where they are walking while taking out trash or loading materials onto a loading dock. **Ramps, slopes or any other areas where ice and snow may accumulate** and create a slip/fall hazard should also be noted and checked for proper lighting. Identification is always the first step to fixing an issue. Therefore, it can be greatly beneficial to ask others if they have experienced areas that may be poorly lit.

Another issue that often gets overlooked is office/work area lighting and setup. Poor/improper lighting can also affect you in various ways and lead to chronic issues with your eyes and optical health.

For instance, if you work in an office environment using computers, your phone, and are often required to read small print, this can be tough on your eyes without proper breaks. **If you introduce lighting that is too bright or too dim, the amount of strain on your eyes can be greatly increased.** A great way to gauge lighting in your office is to have everyone carry out routine tasks, such as viewing a computer monitor, reading small print or other common activities. Ask them to take note of whether they find themselves squinting on the tasks at hand. Ruling out prescription eyewear issues, if multiple people are squinting to focus on small print or their computer screen, the lighting may need some adjustments. Aside from lowering the actual lumens or wattage, light diffusers are a great way to make sure ceiling lights aren't too direct or bright. If lighting is too dim, additional lighting or brighter lights may be necessary.

In addition to the amount of lighting itself, location of your lighting sources can be a factor in chronic eye strain issues. **Workstations should be set up to avoid glare on computer screens.** Also try to avoid direct sunlight coming in from windows. Blinds that sufficiently block direct sunlight can make morning or late afternoon work much easier on the eyes. Proper lighting in your office and work areas can be essential to the optical health of everyone in the workplace.

Not only does proper lighting help to minimize hazards, it can also have an impact on productivity. If a work area is dimly lit, employees may begin to fatigue and lose focus; too bright, and individuals may suffer from eye strain that can cause headaches and other issues impairing their productivity.

Although workplace lighting may not always be a high priority in the world of injury prevention, it can certainly affect employees' productivity and safety.



# Violent Incident Protection

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#### COVERAGE HIGHLIGHTS:

- **Damage** to building and personal property
- **Liability** in the event of a lawsuit against the insured, extended to include off-site educational, recreational and sporting activities
- **Crisis communications support**, including:
  - Victim management
  - Investigation and legal coordination
  - Enhanced security
- **Extra expenses**, including:
  - Funeral costs
  - Counseling for victims and/or family
  - Wages of temporary staff
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