

Risk Manager

Answers, resources and information to help assess and reduce risk

Being Highly Visible Maintenance and Custodial Personnel By Ed Boord

Custodial and maintenance personnel respond when immediate actions are needed for many different types of situations. Be it wintertime snow removal or cleaning up a student's drink that dropped and spilled in the hallway, maintenance and custodial personnel are a vital part of every school's safety, functionality and continuity. These individuals perform duties that require prompt action when an event occurs that creates an unsafe condition for the students and staff members. Wouldn't it be nice to know that when immediate assistance is needed, you would be able to step out in the hallway and easily identify that individual amongst a sea of students?

High-visibility uniforms are one of the easiest ways to make these personnel easily identifiable to other employees in various situations. To further enhance the safety for these individuals, high-visibility vests with reflective material are a great tool to keep them safe while working in dark or low-light conditions, and around vehicular traffic.

The continual improvement and maintenance of the schools and their grounds is the main objective for these personnel. Custodial and maintenance personnel carry out tasks that require a higher level of safety to negate the hazards that they frequently encounter. Often, their work is conducted alone, without supervision or others in the area. Some of the situational hazards custodial and maintenance personnel may be exposed to on a normal basis include but are not limited to:

- Snow and ice removal, especially in the dark early morning hours
- Tasks that require them to perform work outdoors and near vehicular traffic
- Late shifts outdoors or in low lighting areas
- On or around heavy equipment
- In lofts, crawl spaces or other small or confined spaces
- Immediate maintenance of equipment during power outages

Additionally, these personnel may be exposed to higher risk environments that require special safety precautions, such as working at heights or with power tools. If a situation were to occur that puts that individual's life at risk, or they become incapacitated or unconscious, being highly visible can facilitate locating them in a timely manner. Radio communications are often used amongst the maintenance and custodial personnel; however, is not effective if an individual becomes unconscious.

Fluorescent and other brightly colored uniform shirts are inexpensive and provide a quick way to easily identify individuals in the schools and on the grounds. Letter imprinting to display the personnel's

title or simply “staff” also is an option. Vests with highly reflective materials also are inexpensive and easily fit over bulky coats during outside wintertime maintenance, providing increased visibility during the darker hours and near vehicular traffic, such as during school sports or other public events.

The longer a hazard exists, the more potential there is for an incident to occur. Implementing high-visibility uniforms and vests for these key support personnel may assist in reducing the potential for incidents and allows for rapid identification.

For additional information or training on best practices and safety management within your school entity, please contact Director of Risk Management Sharon Orr at (866) 401-6600, ext. 7152 or sorr@cmregent.com.