SPRING 2021

RISK manager

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Follow Custodial + Maintenance Safety

BY THE LETTER

By Mark Nease

Custodial and maintenance staff can consider workplace safety using each letter of the alphabet.

Alone Work – Sometimes you may have to work by yourself and use tools that can put you at a higher risk of accident-related injury. If you must work alone, develop a co-worker check system, requiring you to periodically contact your supervisor to inform her/him that you are ok. A tracking system should be in place in the event you are overdue.

Bloodborne Pathogens – Practice universal precautions at all times; always assume that a potential bodily fluid does in fact contain a deadly pathogenic disease and then proceed to exercise precautions to avoid an exposure. Exercise controls such as using pliers or tweezers to pick up used medical devices, using sharps containers to dispose of contaminated medical devices and using fluid-proof gloves and hand-washing techniques to protect from entry via your skin.

Cut Prevention – Cut injuries can be avoided through proper use of cutting tools. Understand your tools' purposes and limitations. Know when to sharpen cutting edges or replace blades. Use cut-resistant (Kevlar) gloves and/or sleeves when possible.

Desk Movers – A desk mover is a material handling tool that allows a person to transport business-sized desks. Use desk movers in place of lifting and carrying business desks by hand.

Extension Cords – The National Fire Protection Association's National Electric Code defines extension cords as flexible cords for temporary use. Extension cords are not a substitute for fixed wiring. Inspect extension cords for frayed wires and missing third-prong grounds before each use. Destroy (cut into pieces) and discard damaged electrical cords to prevent them from re-entering your equipment inventory.

Footwear – Choose your footwear wisely. Don't let your choice of footwear become a root cause of a debilitating slip/trip/fall injury.

Ground Fault Circuit Interrupters – Ground Fault Circuit Interrupters (GFCIs) are to be installed within six feet of any water source. Inspect school buildings for GFCIs and test them on a monthly basis. When using equipment around water, and that equipment is connected to an extension cord that is plugged into a non-GFCI receptacle, be sure to use an Inline GFCI Extension Cord.

Hot Work – Hot Work is a phrase coined by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) that refers to work tasks involving the use of welding equipment, oxy/fuel gas heating and cutting torches, grinders or other spark-producing equipment that can serve as an ignition source. Be alert to flammables and combustibles near hot work areas to prevent a fire or explosion. Only qualified persons should perform hot work tasks.

Impale Hazards – Impalement is an injury whereby a sharp-ended object pierces a person, potentially resulting in a serious medical condition. Be on alert to impalement hazards at your school. A common impalement hazard is a partially uprooted metal bar used to secure parking blocks and landscaping planks or a metal bar used to identify a property line.

Jump Hazard – Avoid jumping in all circumstances when performing your job. Jumping from a pickup truck bed, a ladder, etc., can result in injury. A safer option is to use the Three-Point Contact Technique to perform your task.

Keep Your Body Temperature in Check (Cold-Stress/Heat-Stress Safety) – Know your risks to cold-stress and heat-stress illnesses. Dress warm in the winter season to combat frostbite. Know the symptoms of heat stress and protocols to reduce the risk of a heat illness. A good resource on heat-stress can be found here: https://www.cmregent.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Heat-Related-Illnesses_School-Insurance_Risk.pdf

Ladder Safety – Select a suitable ladder to safely access an area out of reach from the floor. Always use the Three-Point Contact Technique when climbing up or down a ladder, using the rungs of the ladder to grasp on. Abide by the belly-button rule when performing your task on the ladder; never allow your body's mid-section to go past either vertical rail of the ladder. Otherwise, reaching too far away from the ladder may cause you to fall. Take the time instead to climb down the ladder and move it to the left or right so you can safely gain access to the project.

Mops – Use of hand mops are a necessity at schools. Choose a mop head that comfortably fits you. Mop heads come in various size ranges from 8–10 oz. to 32–40 oz. Using a mop head that fits you can help reduce the stress on your body and may help reduce the possibility of a strain injury.

Near-Miss Incident – The National Safety Council defines a Near-Miss Incident as an unplanned event that did not result in injury, illness or property damage, but had the potential to do so. Think of a near-miss event as a "close call." Report near-miss incidents to your supervisor so that she/he and your safety committee can investigate and correct them before they do result in an injury or property damage.

Occupational Health – Occupational health refers to exposures that may result in an illness. Examples of these exposures include bloodborne pathogenic diseases, contact dermatitis due to poisonous plants or pulmonary illnesses due to chemical use. Follow bloodborne pathogen protocols, learn to identify poisonous plants and review your chemicals' Safety Data Sheet (SDS) to determine pulmonary hazards and corresponding protective measures.

Poisonous Plants – Grounds maintenance staff should be able to easily identify poisonous plants so they can remediate this hazard before acquiring an exposure illness, such as Contact Dermatitis. Here is information from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) regarding typical poisonous plants: https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/plants/identification.html

Qualified – To ensure your safety, you should be qualified to operate specialized equipment, such as powered floor scrubbers or powered material handling vehicles and to perform specialized tasks such as those involving HVAC units, swimming pool chlorine systems and electrical/plumbing installations.

Refresher Training – Refresher training is necessary to ensure you have a clear understanding of safety as you perform your work tasks. Consider refresher training in Body Mechanics and Material Handling Techniques, Bloodborne Pathogens and Slip/Trip/Fall Prevention.

Safety Data Sheets (SDS) – A Safety Data Sheet is an internationally standardized document that encompasses necessary data about a chemical regarding its safe handling, use, storage and disposal. Be sure to periodically review your chemicals' Safety Data Sheets.

Three-Point Contact Technique – This simply means that one should maintain three of four points of contact at all times to maintain stability and reduce the risk of a fall. Use two hands and one foot or both feet and one hand when climbing up or down a ladder, entering/exiting a vehicle, etc.

Unsafe Conditions Inspections – While using checklists, inspect for unsafe conditions at your buildings and grounds. Performing an unsafe conditions inspection (and correcting the hazards) helps keep your buildings and grounds safe during occupancy.

View – Be sure to maintain your view when carrying objects. Carrying bulky objects that obstruct your view can quickly result in a trip/fall accident.

Water – Water is a friend when contained and an enemy when uncontained. Correct conditions that allow water to become uncontained and create a slip hazard. Alert staff to water-stained ceiling tiles as this may be a sign of water leaking through the roof and potentially resulting in a mold hazard.

X-pect (Expect Assistance/Teamwork) – Some custodial tasks, such as lifting heavy or awkward objects, require a team of staff (Team lift) to safely complete. Expect to give or receive assistance from a co-worker during the workday.

Year-end Trash – The end of the school year can be a hectic time due to all departments cleaning and disposing of materials/supplies that accumulated during the school year. Even students participate in "The Great Cleanout" of their lockers during this time. You may be at a higher risk to a strain/overexertion injury since you are responsible for transporting this trash to the dumpsters/recycling containers. Make sure you have a plan in place to safely transport this trash. Communicate with staff on how you expect them to discard items so they don't overload containers.

Zero Accidents – Exercise a Zero-Accident Safety Culture. Everybody is responsible for his/her safety, everybody is capable of working safely and everybody can achieve a goal of zero workplace accidents.

Be sure to take time to consider Custodial/Maintenance safety.

By Derek Neubauer

Playground Equipment Usage During COVID-19

As we come to a full year of the COVID-19 pandemic, everyone would like to get back to normal. And as springtime approaches, that means getting out on the playground.

Early in the pandemic, it was thought better to eliminate recess altogether, but studies have found that recess is important for student social development, as well as providing a change in activity which could possibly improve classroom behavior.

For most of the 2020–2021 school year, school districts have mostly decided to keep students off playground equipment in favor of a more field or asphalt type recess, which allows students a better opportunity for social distancing. However, some school districts may not have the space needed for this.

It can be difficult to stay ahead of cleaning and disinfecting playground surfaces for staff member that are already tasked with cleaning and disinfecting the interior of the building.

Risks

- The main risk when allowing children back on playground equipment is increasing the possibility of infection and of passing COVID-19 throughout the school's students and staff.
- With students being required to wear masks, they can become entangled in playground equipment.
- Also, some masks and face coverings can reduce vision and line of sight.
- Supervision is hard enough during "normal" playground usage, but ensuring social distancing may provide an added burden to playground supervisors.
- The CDC has not provided much playground guidance beyond maintaining 6 feet social distancing and washing hands before and after use.

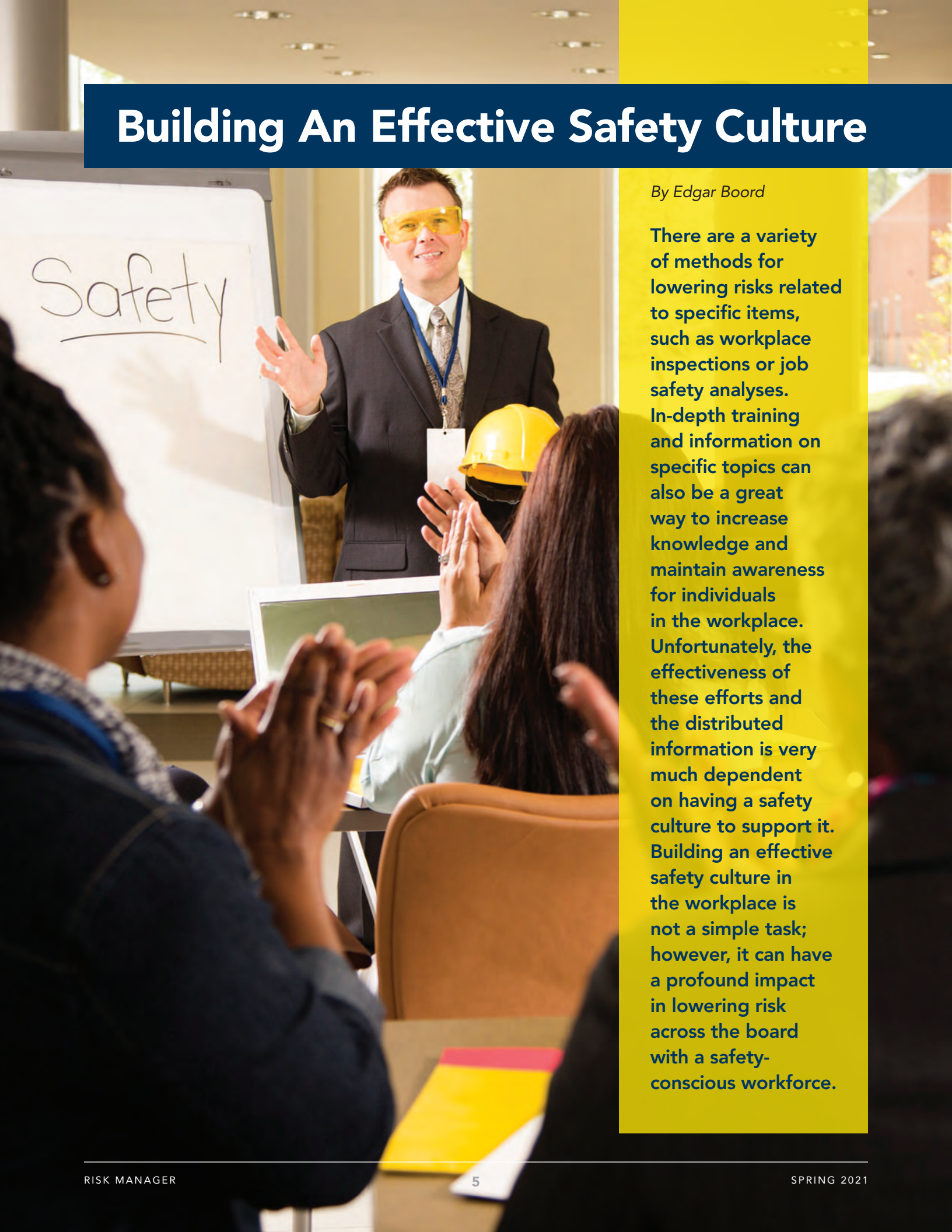
Best Practices/Actionable Items

If your school district is planning to offer recess with the use of playground equipment, here are some best practices:

- Keep students in their classroom groups. If you have several groups scheduled to be outside at the same time, provide different activities to keep them separated. For example: Class A plays kickball and Class B is on the playground equipment.
- Stay diligent to cleaning and disinfecting surfaces. Prioritize common areas for touching. If possible, involve playground supervisors to provide guidance on where students touch equipment the most.
- Supervisors should be vigilant that students are wearing masks properly with no hooks that can increase entanglement with playground equipment.
- If possible, certain playground equipment should be taken out of service.

There is no guarantee with proper mask wearing, social distancing, supervision, and cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces that a student or staff member will not be infected, but the risk can be reduced when these steps are taken. School district administrators must weigh these risks when deciding to allow students on the playground equipment.

Building An Effective Safety Culture



By Edgar Boord

There are a variety of methods for lowering risks related to specific items, such as workplace inspections or job safety analyses. In-depth training and information on specific topics can also be a great way to increase knowledge and maintain awareness for individuals in the workplace. Unfortunately, the effectiveness of these efforts and the distributed information is very much dependent on having a safety culture to support it. Building an effective safety culture in the workplace is not a simple task; however, it can have a profound impact in lowering risk across the board with a safety-conscious workforce.

Benefits

- Cohesiveness – Employees and the school's administration all pitch in toward a common set of safety goals to keep each other safe.
- Safety-conscious employees are more likely to identify safety issues and concerns, as well as provide ideas to help resolve issues.
- Employees are more likely to adhere to written safety policies/procedures or rules.
- Healthy communication and interaction between employees and the safety committee.
- Training and disseminated safety information is more likely to be reviewed and retained instead of overlooked or ignored.

Methods to Develop An Effective Safety Culture

School Administration – Establishing a Caring Safety Presence

- **Safety Committee** – A functional and diligent safety committee is possibly the most useful tool for creating an effective safety culture. A committee should be the face of safety, with member representatives from the various departments/buildings. The committee is also the liaison for employees to voice their ideas/concerns. Through the development of recommended actions, the safety committee is also the best tool for reducing incident potential.
- **Inclusion** – Making sure employees have a voice and are able to participate in reaching the goal of safety in the workplace.
- **Safety Information** – Frequent distribution of safety-related information. Taking it a step farther and holding supervisor/department safety talks on occasion can be an excellent way to connect with employees through open discussion.
- **Signage** – Safety signs with simple reminders or warnings not only provide a specific message, but can also send a broader message to employees that their safety is important.

Employee Participation – Setting an Example can be Contagious

- Become an example of safety for others by **participating in safety efforts**.
- **Volunteer** to become a member of the safety committee.
- Provide suggestions and **report safety issues** to the safety committee so that the matter can be discussed, and corrective actions developed.
- **Follow the rules** and written procedures/policies set by your school's administration.
- Take the time to **review safety-related information**, even if it is not formal or mandatory. This may include safety emails or handouts and listening/participating during a department safety talk.
- **Encourage co-workers** to follow your lead, adhering to written procedures/policies, and taking part in establishing a safe work environment.

It is best to consider the development of an effective safety culture as a long-term solution, and not just to fix a specific issue. There is not one single action that will automatically create this type of environment, but rather a multitude of efforts that can gradually shift your school closer to meeting this goal.

As mentioned, an active and goal-focused safety committee can be the driving force in establishing a conducive safety culture. Once this culture begins to grow and take root, the immediate and long-term benefits will begin to take place. It is at this point where the culture can easily become self-sufficient moving forward, lowering risk and reducing potential for incidents in the workplace.

Alcohol-based Hand Sanitizer
STORAGE CONSIDERATIONS

By Kyle Stewart

As one way to protect yourself and others from transmission of COVID-19, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends frequent hand washing with soap and water after being in a public place, coughing and/or sneezing.

In the absence of hand-washing facilities, alcohol-based hand rub (ABHR) can be used as a temporary measure to kill viruses and bacteria. Hand sanitizers use ethyl or isopropyl alcohol as the active ingredient to kill viruses and bacteria.

The CDC recommends an alcohol content of at least 60% for hand sanitizers to be most effective in killing COVID-19 and other similar viruses and bacteria. Most alcohol-based hand sanitizers manufactured in the United States are 60 to 90 percent alcohol by volume.

Based on the percent of alcohol, most hand sanitizers are considered a Class IB or Class IC flammable; however, refer to the Safety Data Sheet (SDS) for specific flammability characteristics.

Risks

- Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are flammable liquids; if not stored properly, ABHRs can ignite when exposed to an open flame or ignition source.
- If the ABHR storage area is not protected by an automatic sprinkler system and ABHRs ignite, rapid fire spread can endanger the ability of building occupants to safely evacuate the area and result in substantial damage to the facility.
- The combination of plastic containers in which ABHR are packaged and the presence of combustible materials (i.e., cardboard packaging, pallets) present further challenges in quickly extinguishing a fire, should one occur in the ABHR storage area.
- Limiting the quantity of flammable liquids stored outside of a flammable storage room or flammable liquids storage cabinet can greatly reduce fire spread and building/content loss should a fire occur.
- The maximum quantity of flammable liquids permitted in a facility varies by occupancy, building construction, presence of sprinkler systems and storage location. Consult with your local fire marshal, building codes and regulatory/consensus standards (i.e., OSHA, NFPA).

Best Practices/Actionable Items

- Temporary Preventative Measures:
  - Reduce the quantity of ABHR on-site to the minimum amount necessary to support operations.
  - Modify purchase orders to receive smaller quantities on a more frequent basis.
  - Store ABHR away from other combustibles (i.e., cardboard, wood) to reduce additional "fuel sources" should a fire occur.
  - Remove any ignition sources that may ignite vapors emitting from alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
  - Avoid storing ABHRs in locations occupied by staff members and/or in designated means of egress to permit staff to quickly and safely evacuate the building.

- Store flammable liquids in a detached building (i.e., trailer, shed) of low value. Maintain sufficient distance from occupied building(s) should a fire occur in the building used to store ABHR.
- Ensure caps/lids are tight and secure to minimize vapors escaping from the ABHR storage container.
- Avoid storing ABHR in locations subjected to extreme temperature/sunlight. This includes vehicles during warm temperatures.

- In general, storing flammable liquids in excess of 10 gallons within educational buildings should be in an approved flammable storage cabinet and/or flammable liquids storage room in accordance with the requirements outlined in the National Fire Protection Association Standard #30 (NFPA 30).
- Proper storage of flammable liquids will greatly reduce the potential for fire or explosion.
  - A flammable liquids storage room should meet the following minimum standards in accordance with the current edition of the National Fire Protection Association Standard No. 30 (NFPA 30) to reduce the hazard(s) associated with flammable liquids:

    Location: The storage room should not be located in the basement.

    Construction: The construction should be of fire resistive material with a fire rating of at least two hours. It is desirable for one wall of the room to be an outside wall.

    Openings: Door openings should be protected by UL-listed fire door assemblies, with a fire resistive rating equal to the wall. The doors should be self-closing or automatic closing. Methods of containment, such as liquid-tight curbs or open trenches that drain to a safe location, should be provided.

    Explosion Venting: Explosion venting should be provided for flammable liquid storage rooms in accordance with the current edition of the National Electrical Code (NFPA 70).

    Electrical Equipment: All electrical equipment such as lights, motors, electrical fixtures, etc., should be suitable for Class I, Division 2, Hazardous Locations, as defined in the current edition of the National Electrical Code (NFPA 70).

    Ventilation: The storage room should be equipped with a continually operating positive ventilation system, sufficient to remove flammable vapors and capable of six air changes per hour. Exhaust outlets should be located away from the air intake to prevent contamination of intake air supply. The exhaust fan and motor should be approved for Class I, Division 2, Hazardous Locations in accordance with the current edition of the National Electrical Code (NFPA 70).

    Protection: The flammable liquids storage room should be protected by an automatic extinguishing system. This system can be automatic sprinkler, dry chemical or foam.

- Consult with your local fire marshal, building codes and regulatory/consensus standards (i.e., NFPA, OSHA).
  - Communicate flammable liquids storage locations and permit emergency response agencies to survey the flammable liquids storage location(s) to develop response plans should a fire occur requiring emergency services to respond.
  - Ensure fire protection systems/components (i.e., flammable storage cabinets, extinguishing systems) have been tested by a nationally recognized testing laboratory (i.e., FM Approvals, UL).
  - Ensure flammable liquids storage room(s) are designed by individuals experienced and knowledgeable in accordance with NFPA 30.

References:

Centers for Disease and Prevention (www.cdc.gov)

National Fire Protection Association (NFPA 30: Flammable and Combustible Liquid Code)

PEST MANAGEMENT

IN THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

By Jake Ruziecki

Pests such as fleas, lice, termites, cockroaches and rodents pose serious health risks for staff, faculty, students and visitors to your buildings. In addition, Orkin indicates that nationwide, these pests cause tens of billions of dollars in damage every year.

These pests can be found in many areas throughout school buildings that offer food or nesting areas including cafeterias, classrooms, utility closets and mechanical rooms, lockers and locker rooms, dumpsters and even buses.

When considering your areas of exposure for pests, along with your buildings as a whole, you can develop and implement policies and procedures supporting integrated pest management (IPM). By developing a program supporting IPM, you can promote a healthy environment that follows United States Environmental Protections Agency recommendations.

Risks

- Many of the pests mentioned above, including cockroaches and rodents, are responsible for spreading pathogens harmful to humans such as Salmonella, Listeria and Escherichia coli (better known as E. coli). It is even estimated by the EPA that rodents can carry approximately 50–60 pathogens in some areas.
- Pests such as mice and cockroaches are also documented by the International Study of Asthma and Allergies in Childhood (ISAAC) to create allergens that can potentially trigger asthma. It is estimated that in every classroom of 30 individuals, approximately three will have asthma.
- Rodents are capable of squeezing through openings as small as ¼ of an inch. When conduit or other areas aren't properly sealed, rodents and other pests may be able to gain access and cause extensive damage to electrical systems.

Best Practices/Actionable Item

- Eliminate points of entry by:
  - Keeping windows and doors closed when those areas are unoccupied.
  - Sealing gaps and openings around windows and doors by providing weather stripping, door sweeps, and installing screens on windows.
  - Sealing cracks and holes in exterior walls, around pipes, electrical and HVAC.
- Improve housekeeping, food storage and cleaning procedures by:
  - Restricting food and beverages to designated areas such as break rooms and cafeterias to ensure any food related messes have been properly cleaned.
  - Dusting and vacuuming regularly to remove clutter, debris and allergens.
  - Having lockers, workstations and storage/utility closets cleaned on a regular basis.
- Improve sanitation in kitchen and food serving areas:
  - Ensure all food scraps, crumbs and spills are cleaned up as promptly as possible and grease accumulations are cleaned routinely.
  - Place screens on vents, windows and floor drains to prevent cockroaches and other pests from using these areas as points of entry.

Many schools have environmental exposures that are vulnerable to pest infestations; therefore, it is necessary for schools to develop and implement programs surrounding pest management to reduce health risks and property damage. Development of an IPM program, consulting with a local pest control contractor and reaching out for information on local and federal requirements will provide the necessary tools for creating a safe and healthy environment.

For more information on IPM programs and recommendations, visit www.epa.gov/ipm.

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