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RISKmanager

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UNOBSTRUCTED: EASY ACCESS WHEN IT MATTERS

By Edgar Boord, risk control consultant

Throughout every workplace, there are various items, installations and areas where quick and easy access is essential. This may be for emergency response, security, workstation ergonomics or to prevent a hazardous situation from occurring. In this article, we will examine various situations that require an employee to quickly respond or access items for their own safety, as well as the safety of others.

Risks

- **Building Security** – With the prominence of security in a school setting, and the need for quick response to an intruder or other security situation, access to security installations (i.e., alarm systems) is vital.



- **Emergency Response** – Emergency situations requiring quick response can include fires, fuel leaks, severe weather, equipment malfunctions and individual/employee safety.
- **Electrical Installations** – In addition to the need for quick access to installations (i.e., an electrical disconnect), clutter and combustible materials stored on and around these installations can present possibility for fires and/or a severe arc flash/blast event.
- **Workstation Ergonomics** – Although ergonomic issues are often perceived to be less than a major hazard, daily routines without proper ergonomics can result in cumulative/chronic injuries to an employee. Continual reaching for frequently used items can often result in ergonomic issues.

Best Practices

- **Security Control Location/Access** – Security controls and buttons should be conveniently located for individuals authorized to use them in the event of a security situation. This should be the case for any authorized personnel who manage the building's security functions, such as security gates/vestibules, alarm systems and emergency communication systems.
- **Emergency Response and Controls** – Fire fighting and other similar emergency response equipment should be highly visible to occupants/personnel and easy to access. For instance, fire extinguishers should be hung off the floor with signage. Other controls that should be easily accessible can include fuel or equipment shut off switches, chemical spill kits, first aid kits and AEDs (Automated External Defibrillator). These items should be strategically

located in areas where the related hazard is prominent. For example, fuel shut off switches/buttons should be visibly located for an operator or nearby personnel to quickly access, but far enough away that personal injury from fire or explosion is not a concern.

Timely access and reaction can be incredibly important when it comes to emergency situations.

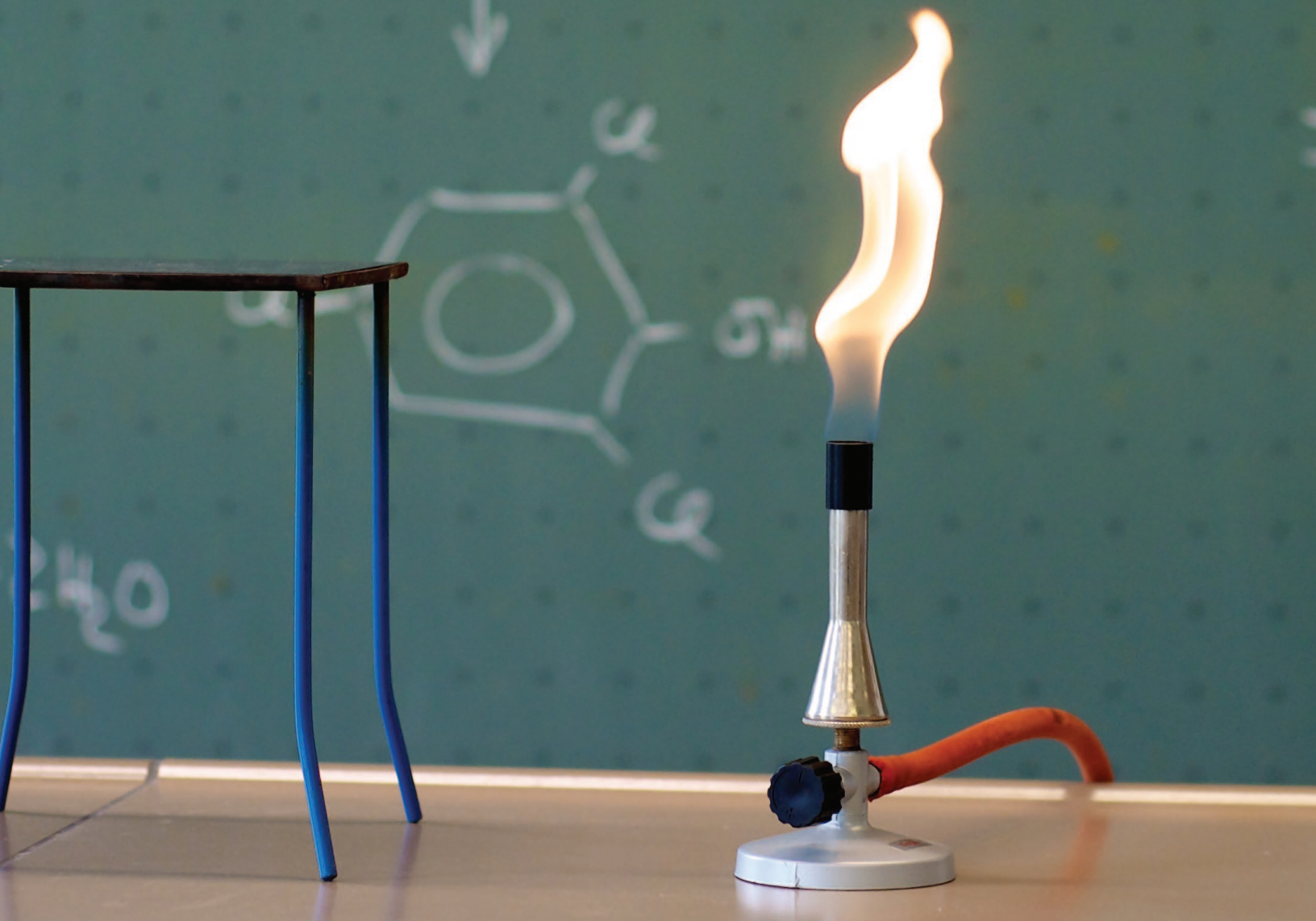
- **Electrical Installation Clearance** – Electrical installations such as breaker panels, disconnects and mains should have a minimum of 3 feet of clearance around them as well as clear access to the installation. In an emergency, power to equipment and areas of a building may need to be disconnected in a timely manner to avoid potential for a catastrophic incident. In addition, combustible and conductive materials stored on and around an installation may lead to incidental contact, possibly resulting in a fire or severe arc flash/blast event.
- **Ergonomic Workstation Setup** – While at your desk or other workstation, items that are used most frequently should be kept within reach to avoid overreaching and other unnecessary movements. For instance, if you are required to reach across your desk to pick up the phone and answer calls frequently throughout the day, that motion can become incredibly stressful over time. These actions may result in chronic/cumulative injuries, as well as more acute strain injuries. Consider keeping items such as a phone, stapler, pens/pencils, computer mouse and other frequently used items within arm's reach to reduce that potential.

As noted, timely access and reaction can be incredibly important when it comes to emergency situations and the response time needed to prevent a severe incident from taking place. Even when it comes to the normal ins and outs of a workday, items that we rely heavily upon should be readily available to reduce stress on the body. When the safety and security of yourself and those around you is at stake, quick and easy access, reaction and response is imperative.

School Employees' FIRE RISKS

By Mark Nease, risk control consultant

Fire safety is an important element to any safety program. School employees may perform tasks—some obvious and some obscured—that can become a fire risk. Here are some fire risks to school employees and information on preventive controls.



- **Oxygen/Fuel-gas Torches, Welding Operations** – Performing tasks with this equipment is called “hot work” for a reason. Careful attention should be given to surrounding areas to prevent the ignition of flammable/combustible liquids or ordinary combustibles (i.e., paper). Only qualified persons should use this equipment. All persons performing hot work should wear flame-resistant cotton clothing.
- **Charging Floor Scrubber Lead-Acid Batteries** – Charge the lead-acid batteries of custodial equipment only at designated locations, away from heat/ignition sources. The process of charging the batteries creates oxygen and flammable hydrogen gas inside the battery’s electrolytic fluid. Overcharging lead-acid batteries can lead to the flammable gas exiting the battery into the room—or worse, the battery exploding. Be sure to follow the equipment’s instructions whenever charging any battery.
- **Chemical Storage Compatibility** – Incompatible chemicals can react when mixed, creating toxic gases, heat/fire and/or an explosion. Examples include oxidizers/reducing agents, fuel gases/oxygen and acids/bases. The best means to determine the incompatibility of chemicals for proper storage is through Section #7 (Handling & Storage) of the chemicals’ Safety Data Sheet (SDS).
- **Chemistry Experiments** – How safe are your experiments? An experiment performed incorrectly can have negative consequences. Choose experiments that with safety precautions, can both teach students and result in no injuries/illnesses and property damage.
- **Kiln Use** – Only authorized persons should use the kiln. Be sure to remove all flammable liquids or combustible materials near the kiln. Remember that the fire tetrahedron specifies that for a fire to exist, there needs to be a fuel source, heat, oxygen and a chemical chain reaction. Your best fire prevention technique with kiln use is to remove any potential fuel source.
- **Clothes Dryers** – Schools may have clothes dryers for their kitchen operations. The same fire hazards associated with residential clothes dryers apply to those for commercial use. Follow the clothes dryers’ manual for the dryers’ safe operation.
- **Oily Rags** – Oils, such as vegetable oils, oil-based paints/stains/varnishes or linseed oils/paint thinners, can slowly heat to an ignition point through an oxidation process when exposed to air. When oily rags are placed into a pile, the heat may not escape, which can result in an ignition known as spontaneous combustion. You can eliminate this risk through the avoidance of oil-based paints and solvents. When oil-based solvents are necessary for operations, you should use work-practice controls. Place soiled rags into a container filled with water (to remove the oily rags’ contact with oxygen) until safely disposed of. Oily rags that are not completely free of oil after washing can cause a fire when dried in a clothes dryer.
- **Refueling Grounds Maintenance Equipment with Gasoline** – Gasoline will ignite when exposed to heat. Never refill grounds maintenance equipment when the engines are still hot. Always let engines cool before refilling. Use Underwriter Laboratories (UL) and National Fire Protection Association (NFPA-30) approved gasoline safety containers. Type 2 safety containers have the following safety features:
 - Two openings; one with a lift lever for filling and a second opening with a flexible metal hose for accurate pouring into a small opening.
 - A gasketed, leakproof, self-closing lid to control spills and to allow excess vapor pressure to self-vent to prevent an explosion.
 - A flame-arrestor screen to extinguish flames before reaching flammable vapors inside the container.

Now that you are familiar with some common fire risks in schools, take some time to analyze your job tasks to see which fire risks may apply to you. Work with your supervisor and your safety committee in developing protocols to mitigate these risks as you perform your work tasks.



Workplace Safety

By Kyle Stewart,
risk control consultant

ARE YOU PREPARED FOR A Workplace Safety Committee Certification Audit?

The role of certified workplace safety committees is to improve safety and health in the workplace through:

- Conducting **hazard identification surveys**.
- Reviewing **work-related injury reports**.
- Developing corrective actions and/or preventative measures to **mitigate hazard exposure(s)**.

Safety committees also play a vital role in “changing/improving safety culture” within your organization. The committee should offer solutions by going beyond simply identifying hazards.

When submitting the initial/renewal application(s) for certification, the committee attests it met all regulatory requirements for certification and is eligible for the workers’ compensation policy premium discount.

Certified workplace safety committees are randomly selected for audits by the Bureau of Workers’ Compensation (BWC). During an audit, the committee recordkeeping documentation is reviewed to confirm the committee met all regulatory requirements to maintain certification status.

Risks

Some potential Safety Committee pitfalls include:

- “Staff too busy” to address safety concerns/deficiencies.
- Small percentage of staff who actively participate on the committee.
- Additional workload created for “employer-representative” if only identifying hazards and not offering solutions.

To verify your committee complies with requirements under Act 34 toward the 5% workers’ compensation premium reduction, the BWC may conduct a random audit of your school’s safety committee. You will receive a 30-day notification prior to the BWC Division conducting the audit.

Note: Due to the current pandemic restrictions, audits continue to be conducted virtually as opposed to an on-site evaluation.

- During the audit, there will be an opening conference to indicate what the audit can do, cannot do and will not do.
- The audit pertains to a review/evaluation of your recordkeeping documentation; the audit will not include a physical survey/evaluation of your facility or equipment.
- Information related to your committee is verified; if requested, the committee chairperson or other designee may be required to provide additional information to the auditor.

- The closing conference will issue a preliminary compliance or non-compliance rating.
- Non-compliance issues will be explained by the auditor.
- Results of the audit are reviewed at the BWC and a determination is made as to whether the company's committee will be re-certified.
- A written audit report will be issued stating the official findings.
- If the audit determines the committee did not meet the regulatory requirements for certification; the committee may lose certification status and thus not be eligible for the 5% workers' compensation premium discount.
- To be eligible for the 5% discount, the committee will be required to meet regulatory requirements for certification and re-apply for certification during the next application period (beginning 90 days up to 30 days prior to policy renewal date).

Best Practices/Actionable Items

Documentation must be **in writing**. You cannot prove the committee met regulatory criteria for certification if the committee cannot reference a written document! Thoroughly document (in writing) the actions, discussions and recommendations completed by the committee.

Note: Your meeting minutes should be descriptive and encompass more than a few sentences!

Written documentation for inclusion in the safety committee's recordkeeping includes, but is not limited to:

- Agendas.
- Meeting minutes.
- Inspection checklists.
- Accident investigation reports.
- Memo/email communication(s).
- Recommendations to your school's administration, etc.

Steps to take before receiving notification of an audit:

- Review safety committee recordkeeping documentation to ensure essential elements are documented.
- Conduct a self-assessment using the "Safety Committee Compliance Checklist."
- The "Compliance Checklist" can be found in the **BWC's Workplace Safety Committee Technical Assistance/Certification Assistance Manual**.
- Review your committee's bylaws and Safety & Health Policy documents. Is the committee operating in accordance with these documents?
- Has the committee reviewed/updated these documents following initial development when the committee was established and applied for initial certification?
- Request your designated Risk Control Consultant to evaluate your committee's recordkeeping practices, workplace safety committee operations and provide recommendations, where applicable, for improvement to your committee's recordkeeping and/or operational practices.

Preparing for the audit:

- Is the committee's recordkeeping documentation organized by monthly meetings for each policy period?
- If the committee maintains its recordkeeping documentation in electronic form, compile a three-ring binder organized by month for the current and prior two workers' compensation policy periods.

Thoroughly document (in writing) all activities completed by the committee. Conduct a self-assessment using the "Safety Committee Compliance Checklist" which can be found in the **BWC's Workplace Safety Committee Technical Assistance/Certification Assistance Manual**. Seek assistance from your designated Risk Control Consultant prior to receiving notification of a pending audit.

Reducing Your Risk of Crime:

How to Better Protect Your Exterior Assets

by Jake Ruziecki, risk control consultant

In part one of the two-part series on reducing your risk of crime-related occurrences, we covered the areas of exposure within your buildings. This included valuables such as artwork, IT equipment and servers, vocational lab tools including medical equipment and welding equipment, and facilities equipment such as tools and power equipment.

In part one of this series we also discussed best practices such as performing regular building checks, restricting access within the building and periodically reviewing coverage needs for additional security cameras and intrusion alarms throughout your buildings.

In part two we will cover the risks, improvement opportunities and best practices that will allow you to better protect valuable equipment, vehicles and material stored outside your buildings.

While you may not realize it, your exposure to crime-related incidents is just as great, if not more so, for exterior property and equipment. Criminals can often easily identify and take advantage of a lack of security measures provided for the exterior of your property.

Risks

- The most significant risk for exterior crime-related incidents is damage to property and structures, including arson and vandalism. Areas that are often unmaintained and lack deterrents such as exterior lighting and cameras can often give criminals the green light that these areas are not monitored.
- Vehicles, trailers and their contents are also at risk for criminal activity. Aside from the likelihood of theft of a vehicle, trailer or their contents, the growing trend in criminal activity is the removal of catalytic converters from vehicles. This valuable part of every vehicle's exhaust system contains precious metals that have skyrocketed over 50% in value in 2020, and often can be sold to a recycling facility at over \$1,000 per part.
- Another risk associated with exterior property is vandalism. Criminals often take advantage of poorly protected areas such as football stadiums, playgrounds and athletic fields. Damage to bleachers and equipment in these areas can increase liability exposure if an individual was to be injured on damaged equipment. These areas can often be incredibly costly when it comes to having replacement pieces purchased and installed.
- If your property includes storage sheds, loading docks or storage bays for vocational education, then you're likely storing large amounts of valuable working material and tools in these areas. While these items are often not worth much individually, these kinds of storage areas can offer a large haul for someone who is able to bring their own vehicle well onto your property and quickly and easily load up large quantities of material and/or equipment.

Best Practices/Actionable Item

- **Perimeter Security** – The first point of entry onto your property is the most important area to focus your attention. Access gates, perimeter fencing and signage will always be the first line of defense against criminals. Although fencing may be

expensive and impractical for larger properties, natural access controls such as landscaping and combined access gates offer a more feasible solution to deter criminals. Preventing unauthorized vehicle access will not only reduce your risk of criminal events, it may also reduce how much property can be easily and quickly taken.

- **Exterior Security Systems** – It's recommended to periodically review exterior building coverage needs for additional security fencing, cameras and lighting. Identifying areas in need of additional coverage will allow you to take proactive measures to limit blind spots that give criminals the opportunity to remain undetected. It's also important to consider providing coverage for smaller storage buildings, playgrounds and overnight vehicle storage lots.
- **Administrative Controls** – As we discussed earlier, vehicles, storage sheds and pole barns offer areas of opportunity for criminal activity. Consider requiring staff to park vehicles in adequately illuminated areas near the school building overnight and securing vehicle keys in a lock box inside the building. Making a routine of securing sheds and valuable material and tools at the end of each day will make it more difficult for criminals who are often acting in a hurry. An easy way to encourage and document security measures is to include these tasks on building checks/walkthroughs at close.

When you consider putting these security controls into place, and reevaluate your existing controls, you'll be more likely to deter intruders from attempting to gain unauthorized access to your property; therefore, reducing your likelihood of losses.

If you feel your existing security measures are lacking, consider contacting a reputable security contractor, landscaping contractor or your assigned Risk Control Consultant for further guidance.

SAFETY AROUND THE SHOP:

PORTABLE TOOLS

by Derek Neubauer, risk control consultant

This is the fourth of a four-part series to introduce and review best practices that should be taken for the most used equipment in the shops. In this issue, we will discuss general portable tool safety.

The most common portable tools used in schools include: **chop saws, portable grinders, reciprocating saws (SAWZALL), circular saws and drills.**

Hand and power tools are a common part of our everyday lives and are present in nearly every industry. These tools help us to easily perform tasks that otherwise would be difficult or impossible. However, these simple tools can be hazardous and have the potential for causing severe injuries when used or maintained improperly. Special attention to hand and power tool safety is necessary to reduce or eliminate these hazards.

At the high school level, portable tools can be used by both staff (instructor, maintenance staff) and students in maintenance shops, wood shops, metal shops, STEAM labs and art rooms.

Injuries can include cuts, amputation, eye and head injuries.

Risks

- Contact injuries are the most common type of injury. This occurs when a body part comes in contact with the portable tool, most commonly hand injuries.
- Eye and face injuries can occur from the lack of personal protective equipment and entanglement with gloves or improper clothing during use.

- Injuries are more common outside the occupational setting.

Best Practices

- The instructor should provide **training on the equipment** prior to use.
- Equipment should **not be carried or disconnected** by the cord.
- Portable tools and the extension cords should be **put away after use.**
- **Proper eye protection or face shields** should be provided and should be used during all times of operation. Gloves and loose clothing should not be used.
- **Hands and fingers should always stay clear** of the cutting areas during operation.
- **Use clamps** when possible to secure the work to keep hands away from the "working area."
- The instructor should **check moving parts and blades** on a periodic basis.

Most students will not use this type of equipment in their professional lives, but it is likely they will use the equipment post-high school and hopefully these safety lessons can be taken into everyday life.

With the use of proper training and personal protective equipment, portable tools can remain the most versatile, portable and safe part of any school's vocational program.



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