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RISKmanager

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Cafeteria Safety – By the Letter

By Mark Nease – Senior Risk Control Consultant

Consider cafeteria safety with each letter of the alphabet...



Allergens – While keeping cognizant of common food allergy types, avoid potential cross-contamination of food via cookware and serving utensils.



Class “B” Fires – These are fires involving flammable or combustible fuels, such as cleaning chemicals and cooking oils. Select fire extinguishing agents capable of extinguishing a Class B fire, such as foam, dry chemical or carbon dioxide.



Combi-Ovens – Combi-Ovens provide a means of cooking foods using convection fans and steam injection. A common failure point is related to door seal wear, which can lead to steam burns upon opening the door. Provide routine inspections and preventative maintenance on your kitchen’s Combi-Ovens.



Deep Fryers – Deep Fryers pose many hazards, including grease burns to staff and property loss due to fires. Know your cooking protocols when operating deep fryers. Only use deep fryers with an exhaust hood and a self-extinguishing automatic fire suppression system.



Equipment Training – Provide initial and then periodic equipment training sessions on all kitchen equipment. Be sure all cafeteria staff know the locations of fire protection equipment, including fire extinguishers and the manual pull station of the range hood extinguishing system.



Footwear – Choose footwear that is manufactured for cafeteria environments. Such footwear provides slip-resistant traction, water-resistant uppers that are closed-toe and possibly an added feature, anti-fatigue cushioning.



Gases – Kitchens can pose a toxic gas environment and therefore should be monitored. Carbon monoxide, a byproduct of incomplete combustion of the gas appliances, provides a toxic health hazard to occupants. Maintain exhaust hood systems for adequate room air changes per hour (ACH) to maintain fresh air and utilize commercial grade carbon monoxide detection systems.



Hoods – Range hoods are a local exhaust ventilation system designed to capture heat, gases and smoke from the cooking operation before those contaminants reach food services staff. Clean and inspect the range hood filters and ducting to ensure continual safe operation.



Inspections – Get in the habit of inspecting your work areas throughout the day and making immediate corrections. Make notes of items that require maintenance tickets and alert appropriate staff.



Just Ask – There should be open communication amongst cafeteria staff for safety management to be effective. Staff should be encouraged to ask questions if they have doubt on how to operate equipment or perform a food service task. Staff should be encouraged to ask a co-worker for assistance when the task is perceived as being too dangerous if performed alone. Food service directors should instill into cafeteria staff to just ask.



Kettles – A steam-jacketed kettle, commonly found in school kitchens, is an excellent appliance to cook large batches of soups and sauces. They are designed to operate by inducing steam between an outer pot and an inner pot, to have an even jacket of heat to cook the batch of food. Some have a tilt feature to allow operators to pour the batch of food into serving trays. Operators of steam-jacketed kettles should be trained on their safe operation and specific protocols to prevent burn injuries.



Ladders – Cafeteria staff may need to access items out of reach from the floor, such as in the dry goods storage room. Select suitable length stepladders to accommodate the various cafeteria job tasks. Designate a spot for the ladder to be stored, so that it can be returned. Remember, an unreturned ladder can cause co-workers to take safety risks by using objects in lieu of the missing ladder, and then having an accident. See the following risk manager article for additional information:
<https://cmgroup.widen.net/s/kdvwn9txv6/ladder-safety-cmr-2017-spring-risk-manager>



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Machine Guards – Engineers of commercial kitchen equipment design guards to protect operators from equipment hazards. Only operate kitchen equipment with all guards correctly installed. This is for your protection from injury.



Near-Miss Incidents – A near-miss incident is an unplanned event that did not result in injury, illness or property damage, but had the potential to do so. Report near-miss incidents to your supervisor/safety committee so these can be investigated and remedied before they have an opportunity to resurface and result in an injury or property damage.



One-Off Risks – Cafeteria staff should continuously participate in situational awareness of their work environments as they perform one-off/non-routine tasks. See the following risk manager article for additional information: <https://cmgroup.widen.net/s/w5dscqfq88/one-off-incidents-and-high-risk-work-activities-cmr-2021-fall-risk-manager>



Purple K Fire Extinguisher – A Class “K” fire extinguisher, called Purple K, is designed to extinguish fires involving cooking media, such as vegetable oils and animal fats. Purple K fire extinguishers use potassium as the media, sprayed as a lavender tint, and work on interrupting the chemical reaction of the fire through a principle called saponification.



Quick-Paced – Kitchens can be quick-paced environments – they therefore need to be managed well. Develop an action plan so all food can be cooked and served in the student lunch periods without requiring staff to rush or take shortcuts that could lead to an accident.



Refrigerator/Freezers – Refrigerators and freezers found in schools are typically the walk-in type, which come with safety hazards. Hazard types include entrapment, slips/trips/falls, strains, low temperature exposures and struck-by falling object injuries. See the following risk manager article for additional information: <https://cmgroup.widen.net/s/nszfcgdclw/walk-in-coolers-cmr-2019-summer-risk-manager>



Steam Tables – Steam burns have been found to be more prevalent at steam tables that are in serving lines. Using steam-protective gloves, along with a safe procedure for removing pans from steam tables, can help prevent steam burns to cafeteria staff.



Tilt-Skillets (tilt-brasiers) – These appliances allow food staff to cook large batches of food via steaming, frying, boiling, grilling or sauteing, and then safely transfer the food to a container by tilting the unit forward and scooping or pouring the contents into a serving pan. Since pouring the contents through the tilt feature may pose a hazard to staff, using two people to perform this task can help reduce the risk of burn injuries, not to mention food waste, should the food land on the floor.



Uniforms – Cafeteria staff should wear uniforms designed for this occupation. Uniforms help staff maintain health and safety standards by protecting themselves from injury and by protecting the consumers from possible food contamination.



Ventilation – General ventilation is necessary to introduce fresh air into the kitchens through a number of air changes per hour (ACH) to replace air exhausted through the range hood. Range hoods are necessary to remove cooking steam, carbon monoxide gas and heat from the kitchen before it reaches the breathing zone of food services staff. Ensure general ventilation and secondary ventilation systems, such as range hoods, always operate effectively.



Washing Cookware – Follow proper washing of cookware/utensils to prevent foodborne bacteria. Using the three-sink method, wash equipment in the first sink compartment, rinse that equipment in the second sink compartment and sanitize it in the third sink compartment.



“X”-tinguishing systems – A good rule of thumb is to incorporate self-extinguishing fire protection systems where the cooking appliance has the opportunity to emit grease-laden vapors. Grease-laden vapors are a Class B fuel source.



Mr. Yuk – A mascot created in the 1970s and still used today, Mr. Yuk warns children (and adults) about products that are poisonous, along with information on poison control centers. Since cafeteria staff use cleaning chemicals, which can be poisonous, remember to store cleaning chemicals in specific areas, only accessible to kitchen staff. Have Safety Data Sheets for all chemicals and be sure all chemicals are properly labeled, so they cannot unintentionally poison someone.



Zebra – When it comes to cafeteria safety, not everything is black and white. Cafeteria staff should be active with safety management.

Considerations for Solar Panels

By Derek Neubauer – Senior Risk Control Consultant

Energy is one of the highest costs for school organizations, driving greater interest in renewable energy sources. With the financial utility credit that comes along with these environmental energy production systems, it is becoming more popular to install solar panels or solar arrays on or near school buildings. Solar panels can have many perceived benefits:

- Energy cost savings.
- Reducing reliance on fossil fuels.
- Allowing for a monetary return when selling energy back to the grid.
- Tax benefits.
- Good public relations.
- Possible educational purposes.

RISKS

Solar panel arrays, while generally safe and environmentally friendly, do present some safety issues. Here are four major risks:

- **Electrical Hazards** – Solar panels generate electricity, which can pose a shock hazard during installation, maintenance or emergency situations. Faulty connections or damaged wiring can lead to electrical arcs, which can cause fires. Improper installation, shading issues or equipment failure can cause solar panels to overheat, increasing fire risk.

- **Fire Hazards** – Poor installation or the use of substandard materials can increase the risk of fires. If panels are not properly ventilated or there are faults in the system, overheating can occur, leading to potential fire hazards.
- **Structural and Environmental Concerns** – Improper installation can compromise the structural integrity of roofs or mounting surfaces, potentially leading to collapses or water intrusion. Extreme weather conditions, such as hail, high winds or heavy snow, can damage panels or their mounting systems, posing risks to property and individuals nearby. Poorly installed or maintained mounting systems can fail, especially under extreme weather conditions, leading to panel detachment and property damage.
- **Environmental Impact** – Disposal of solar panels at the end of their lifecycle can pose environmental risks due to hazardous materials if not effectively managed. Land use for large solar farms can affect local ecosystems and potentially disrupt wildlife habitats.

BLOG

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BEST PRACTICES

Implementing best practices for solar panel arrays ensures safety, efficiency and longevity. Here are several key best practices:

1. Site Assessment and Planning:

- **Thorough Site Analysis:** Conduct a detailed analysis of the site, considering factors like sunlight exposure, shading, roof condition, damaging tree limbs and local weather patterns.
- **Permits and Regulations:** Ensure compliance with local building codes, zoning laws and environmental regulations.

2. Design and Installation:

- **Professional Design:** Use certified professionals to design the system, ensuring optimal placement and alignment for maximum efficiency while discouraging on-site Battery Energy Storage System (BESS). Solar arrays should be secured against access by unauthorized personnel via a fence.
- **Quality Materials:** Select high-quality, certified components including panels, inverters, mounting systems and wiring.
- **Proper Mounting:** Ensure the mounting system is robust and suitable for the installation method, accounting for wind load and other environmental factors.
- **Secure Wiring:** Properly secure all wiring to prevent wear and tear, using conduits and protective coverings as needed.
- **Roof Installations:** While roofs may seem a viable option to install solar panels, roof installation is not recommended as it can contribute to damage to the roofing system, may void roof warranty and provide a pathway for water intrusion inside the building.

3. Electrical Safety:

- **Disconnects and Breakers:** Install proper disconnects and circuit breakers to safely isolate the system during maintenance or emergencies.
- **Grounding:** Ensure the system is properly grounded to prevent electric shock and reduce fire risk.

- **Arc Fault Protection:** Include arc fault detection and protection devices to mitigate the risk of electrical fires.

4. Fire Safety:

- **Clearance and Access:** Maintain clearances around the panels and ensure easy access for firefighters and maintenance personnel.
- **Fire-Resistant Materials:** Use fire-resistant materials and avoid installing panels near flammable materials.

5. Maintenance and Monitoring:

- **Regular Inspections:** Conduct regular inspections of the panels, wiring and mounting systems to detect and address any issues early.
- **Cleaning:** Periodically clean the panels to remove dust, debris and bird droppings that can reduce efficiency.
- **Monitoring Systems:** Install monitoring systems to track performance and identify issues in real time.

6. Environmental Considerations:

- **Wildlife Protection:** Implement measures to protect local wildlife, such as fencing around ground-mounted arrays.
- **End-of-Life Management:** Plan for the disposal or recycling of panels at the end of their lifespan to minimize environmental impact.

7. Training and Education:

- **Installer Training:** Ensure all installers and maintenance personnel are professionally trained and certified.
- **Safety Protocols:** Develop and follow safety protocols for all stages of installation and maintenance.
- **Emergency Response:** Train staff and local emergency responders on how to safely manage incidents involving solar panel arrays.

Gathering information and details from contractors about these issues is imperative. By adhering to these best practices, you can enhance the safety, performance and sustainability of your solar panels.

Keep your head in the game!

By Patrick Rucinski – Risk Control Consultant

Athletic programs and events offer not only entertainment for the masses, but also provide opportunities for those involved to grow and develop both physically and socially. While athletic programs and events offer many benefits to players on the field, head injuries are an all-too-common occurrence. Knowing the risks and lingering effects of a head injury can help keep players safe, while also better protecting them from possible long-term effects of an untreated injury.

Risks

Head injuries are difficult to diagnose and can occur in any type of sporting event, no matter how “low impact” the sport may be. Improper treatment of someone with a head injury may exacerbate injuries recently sustained or prior existing conditions. Common activities within athletic environments that lead to concussions include:

- A football player has a history of head-to-head contact during practice and games. After a collision, the coaching staff directs the player to “walk it off.” This repeated head-to-head contact may result in complications such as brain bleeds that accumulate over time, causing symptoms ranging from localized pain to loss of speech and motor functions.
- During an outdoor sporting event, a member of the audience slips and falls while traversing the bleachers, striking their head on the metal steps. The other audience members help them to the bottom of the bleachers and have them seek medical treatment from the Public Safety officials on-site. Proper handrails and surface gripping materials for the bleachers may have assisted in mitigating this fall.
- While in the outfield, a baseball player attempts to catch a pop fly. The ball misses the player’s glove and strikes them in the face. The player says they “feel fine” and appear to have a swollen eye and bloody nose. Their injuries are treated on-site by licensed medical personnel, and they sit in the dugout for the rest of the inning. While the visible facial injuries may be addressed first, the player should be tested for a concussion/head injury.



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- A student joins the school's hockey team. Part of the pre-season checklist for the team is to receive a concussion test. The student ignores this request; they've never had a concussion before and continues to show up to practice and games. Without the student's concussion test results, coaches do not have a baseline to test whether the student has a concussion in the event of a head injury during an event. This could lead to untreated and undiagnosed afflictions should a collision occur.

Best Practices

Head injuries and concussions are some of the hardest to diagnose while also being one of the most serious types of injuries one could experience during a sporting event. The following practices assist in the identification and treatment of head injuries:

- **Testing:** Participants in sporting events should undergo a pre-athletic activity concussion test. The purpose of this testing is to establish baseline metrics for brain functions which includes alertness, memory, vision, reflexes and hearing. Having this data available for everyone participating in the athletic event will aid in the diagnosis of a concussion or brain related injury that may occur during the event. If a head injury occurs, those involved should seek medical attention, even if there are no immediate symptoms.
- **Training:** Athletic event staff should be trained in first aid, including head injury/concussion protocols. Head injuries have the potential to increase in severity if not treated properly. Knowledgeable staff providing proper first aid, such as keeping the person still and treating any visible physical injuries, will assist in the prevention of increased head trauma.
- **Equipment:** Athletic equipment designed to protect the head, neck and face of an athlete should be free of any defects and subjected to regular testing and inspections to ensure its protective qualities, as well as after an impact.
 - Due to the performance and test standards set by the National Operating Committee on Standards for Athletic Equipment (NOCSAE) for certification and recertification of athletic helmets, it is recommended that only the school purchase and provide athletic helmets for school affiliated athletic activities.
 - NOCSAE designates an independent third-party body, Safety Equipment Institute (SEI), to oversee the certification of athletic equipment to NOCSAE standards.
 - NOCSAE requires helmet manufacturers to specify a recertification frequency. If the manufacturer does not specify a frequency for recertification, NOCSAE will consider the frequency to be the same as what the manufacturer requires to maintain its warranty.
 - Some helmet manufacturers do not permit recertification.
- **Helmets** manufactured prior to 2017 should be recertified annually; helmets more than 10 years old cannot be reconditioned.
- **Equipment logs** should be established and maintained to include purchase date, certification date, certification lifespan and accompanying method to distinguish equipment from one another (i.e., tag/ID numbers).
- **Environment:** Athletic fields and facilities should be maintained to provide a safe environment for all participants and audience members. Athletic equipment contacting bystanders, adverse weather conditions affecting ingress and egress, and improper storage of materials within an athletic facility have the potential to cause head injuries. Court containment netting, walking surfaces and equipment storage areas should be free of damage or defects that have the potential to cause or exacerbate a head injury or concussion.

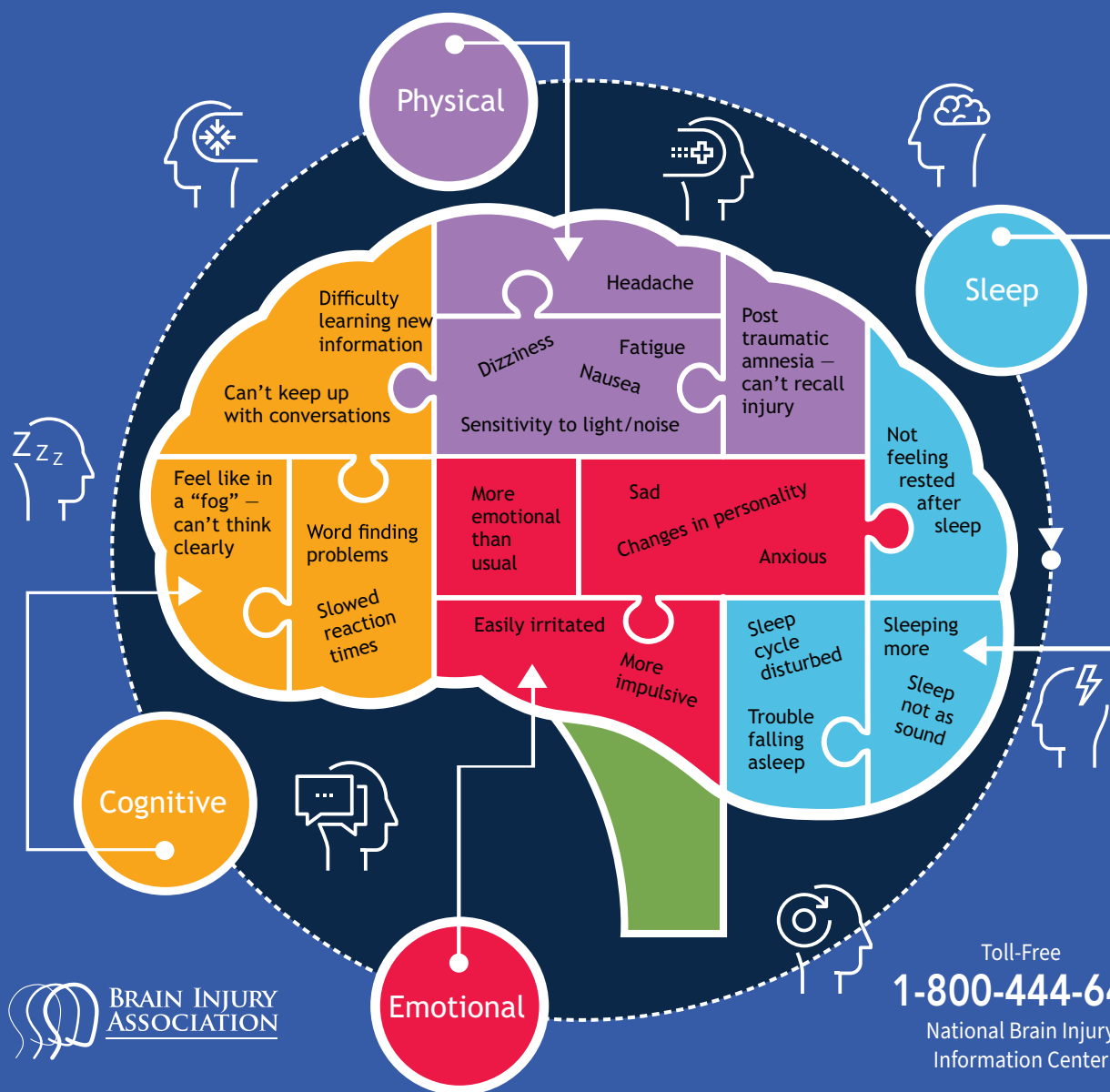
Concussions and other sports-related head injuries are difficult to diagnose and easy to ignore. Too often, individuals who receive head injuries from sporting events assume this type of injury is "just part of the game" or "the risk you take." This is not the case; long term studies have shown that even one concussion can have a lasting impact on an individual for potentially the rest of their life. Proper protective equipment, medical training/testing, and

environmental factor management all have a role to play in the reduction of these types of injuries. Those involved in athletic programs and events should treat every head injury with the potential to have lasting and unseen impacts on the individual. Resources with more available information about

concussions and other athletic related head injuries are: The American Association of Neurological Surgeons (AANS), United States Center for Disease Control (CDC), and the Brain Injury Association of America (BIAA).

Concussion Signs

Concussion can present in a number of ways. This infographic describes common issues people experience after a concussion.



©2020 Brain Injury Association of America

Are aerial work platforms the right call?

By Dennis Kane – Senior Risk Control Consultant



Evaluate the risks before permitting school support staff to perform elevated tasks from aerial work platforms. Use of aerial work platforms can save time; but if not used properly by trained staff, the risk may outweigh the convenience. To reduce the risk of employee injuries, all users should be trained by a qualified person who possesses training credentials from the equipment manufacturer. If qualified training cannot be provided, the equipment should not be used. To reduce liability exposure, school entities should never allow volunteers or students to use aerial work platforms.

Risks

Injuries from the various styles of scissor lifts and vehicle mounted elevating and rotating work platforms (frequently called bucket or boom lifts) can be severe and result in death. Below are some common injury causes:

- Improper use of the aerial lift:
 - Traveling across uneven ground/flooring.
 - Traveling too fast through a turn, which can cause the operator to fall out or the lift to tip over.
 - Using the lift during inclement weather (i.e., high wind, lightning, rain or snow/ice).
 - Overloading the lift with materials or personnel. (Neither scissor lifts nor boom/bucket lifts should be used to lift materials like a crane.)
- Fall injuries caused by:
 - Working from a ladder placed on the floor of the lift.
- Not having the guard railings of a scissor lift fully deployed.
- Leaning too far out over the edge of the railings or sides.
- Using the lift, while elevated, to improperly pull wires.
- Vehicle too close to, or contacts, electrical wiring causing shock injuries or electrocution.
- The platform or bucket striking a fixed object resulting in the operator being pinched or crushed between the lift and the fixed object.
 - Striking a fixed object and tipping over.
- Objects falling from the elevated platform or bucket and striking persons on the ground below or striking and damaging valuable equipment or flooring below.
- Not wearing, or improperly using, fall arrest harnesses and lanyard.

Best Practices

To reduce the risk of injuries and property damage, school entities should consider contracting out elevated work tasks to qualified, insured contractors who use the equipment on a regular basis. For those who own this equipment and use it on a regular basis, the following will help reduce your risk.

Provide equipment-specific training for all operators. Evidence of this training should be documented and kept in a file.

Training should include:

- Selection of the equipment. Is the correct type of equipment available without pushing the safety limits of the equipment?
 - The operator's manual will provide use restrictions that should be strictly followed. These will include:
 - What is the maximum weight carrying capacity?
 - Can the unit be used to pull wires and if so, what are the performance limits?
 - What is the maximum operating surface slope the unit can safely be operated on?
 - How much does the unit weigh?
 - Can the floor safely carry the unit's weight (including personnel and materials)?
 - Hazard recognition, work task knowledge and decision-making topics need to be included to permit staff to determine if existing equipment can be safely used.
 - Can the equipment safely reach where work needs to be performed?
 - Can a scissor lift be used, or should a boom lift be used?
 - Must the lift travel when elevated? If so, is the correct equipment provided? If possible, industry best practice is to travel with the work platform or bucket in its lowest position.
 - Internal combustion engine powered units present the risk of elevated carbon monoxide levels and may not be suited for use inside buildings.
 - Is the use area uneven? Are potholes present? If so, other methods are advised.
- Is the work area on a blind corner where barricades are needed to keep people or other vehicles away?
 - Does the use area have live wires? If so, care should be taken to stay a minimum of 10 feet away or the lines should be de-energized and locked out.
 - Are the manufacturer's operating instructions provided on the lift?
 - How to perform a pre-use inspection of the equipment, including its emergency ground controls. This should include a demonstration.
 - Operators should be given stop work authority if unsafe conditions are suspected or known, or if different equipment is needed to safely perform the work.
 - Verification of skills (i.e., a driving and use test).
 - Specific workplace hazards or rules you have implemented.

Other required training – if using a bucket or boom lift:

- Since fall arrest systems are required when using this equipment, fall protection training should also be provided by a qualified person. This training should include proper use, fitment and inspection requirements for the harness, lanyard and suitable anchors. All training documentation should be kept in a file.

Due to the risk of serious, life-changing injuries, and the amount of required training to help ensure safe operation; the use of aerial work platforms should be carefully considered and, if necessary, other options explored.

For more information, see your lift manufacturer's operator's manual or contact your equipment manufacturer or rental contractor.

BLOG

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MANAGING Playground Safety

By Jake Ruziecki – Risk Control Consultant

According to the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), each year more than 200,000 children in the U.S. visit the emergency room as a result of injuries associated with playground equipment. As a playground owner, it is important to understand the potential hazards and risks associated with playground equipment. Some experts believe playgrounds are where children can develop their risk assessment skills early in their lives; therefore, it only seems reasonable that playground owners should have a formal risk management program for their playgrounds. By establishing a playground risk management program, playground owners can improve the safety and well-being of children at play, work toward meeting current playground safety guidelines, and reduce maintenance and operating costs.

RISKS

All too often, playground owners can feel overwhelmed when trying to assess where their playground safety program currently stands. Some challenges in establishing or managing a playground risk management program include:

- **Resource Constraints** such as budgetary restrictions, limited staff and high replacement costs.
- **Evolving Safety Standards**, which can lead to additional costs associated with continuing education and equipment modification.
- **Documentation and Recordkeeping**, which may have been poorly managed, lost or even destroyed throughout the years.

BEST PRACTICES

To manage these challenges and create an effective playground safety program, consider implementing the following risk management components:

- **Risk Assessment and Hazard Inspections**

Conduct regular playground inspections to identify potential hazards. Inspection frequencies can be scheduled based upon the depth level of the inspection. For example, high frequency inspections for any obvious hazards, wear and tear, and surfacing material depth could be completed daily or weekly depending on the usage level of the equipment.



- **Maintenance and Repair Planning**

Develop a routine maintenance schedule to address any hazards that have been identified, and to repair or replace damaged equipment. Foregoing routine maintenance often leads to

more costly repairs or even the need for complete replacement down the road, and further increases the risk of injury associated with use of the equipment.

- **Staff/Faculty Training**

Any staff or faculty involved in playground safety should receive routine training appropriate to their roles in a playground safety program. Some of these areas include training on playground supervision, playground safety standards and safety inspections, emergency response, and accident reporting.

- **Documentation and Recordkeeping**

It is the responsibility of the playground owner to maintain detailed records of purchase orders, playground drawings/ designs, inspections, maintenance, trainings and accidents/incidents. By doing so, you can more easily track down replacement parts and ensure adequate compliance with playground safety standards.

Establishing a playground risk management program can create a safer, more reliable and cost-effective play environment with the inclusion of hazard inspections, regular equipment maintenance, comprehensive training and thorough recordkeeping. In addition, CM Regent Insurance Company employs several Certified Playground Safety Inspectors who are available to provide Playground Safety Audits at no additional cost to customers with property coverage. Additional Risk Control resources are also available on our website, in our Risk Manager newsletter, and our blog posts on other closely related topics.

SOURCES

Playground Safety Is No Accident, 6th Edition, International Playground Safety Institute, LLC

CPSC – Injuries and Investigated Deaths Associated with Playground Equipment 2009 to 2014: [https://www.cpsc.gov/s3fs-public/Injuries and Investigated Deaths Associated with Playground Equipment 2009 to 2014_1.pdf](https://www.cpsc.gov/s3fs-public/Injuries%20and%20Investigated%20Deaths%20Associated%20with%20Playground%20Equipment%202009%20to%202014_1.pdf)



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Special Event CONSIDERATIONS

By Edgar Boord – Risk Control Consultant

Fireworks, bonfires, carnivals and student vs. teacher competitions are all special events that schools often hold for students and the local community. These might be held as a fundraiser, or to give students a nice leisurely social activity to enjoy. Many special events may seem harmless; however, there are always risk control measures that should be considered during the planning phase of an event.

Risks

Not only is there a risk of injury to students and staff, but there can also be risks that include property damage and liability. Potential risks associated with special events may include:

- Fires and explosions from fireworks and bonfires.
- Damage to gymnasium floors (i.e., donkey basketball).
- Property damage from malfunctioning equipment or improperly secured inflatables.
- Overloaded outlets from various equipment.
- Vehicle collisions due to lack of parking and traffic control during special events.
- Damage or vandalism to property from general facility use during events.
- Event contractors without insurance coverages that meet or exceed the school's insurance coverage.
- Slip, trip and fall injuries from cords, event materials or uneven surfaces.
- Strain injuries from lifting and loading/unloading materials and equipment.
- Allergic reactions to, or injuries from animals.
- Staff member injuries from overexertion during student vs. staff games.
- Injuries from inflatables or mechanized rides (i.e., bounce houses or bull riding).
- Injuries to visitors from any number of hazards that may already exist or were created because of the event.

Best Practices

While planning an event, time should be dedicated to identifying the potential for risks, as well as how to mitigate those risks. Let us break these risks out in separate categories:

Contractor Controls – The contractors used for special events should not only have ample insurance coverages and any required licensing, but also the safety and risk controls associated with their equipment, setup/breakdown, and to some extent, the use of their equipment. Consult with the contractor on what safety controls they have

in place, such as: are equipment inspections/maintenance documented, will competent personnel set up/breakdown equipment, are safe procedures for operation established including for individuals participating/using their equipment (i.e., passengers on mechanized rides)? Contractors may also be able to provide safety suggestions that allow the school to prepare for and mitigate potential risks involved with the event.

Area Controls – A hazard assessment and walkthrough of the potential use areas should take place before an area is selected for the event's operation. This could include environmental conditions such as rabbit/groundhog holes and other uneven surfaces, pest issues (i.e., bee or wasp nest), condition of existing equipment (i.e., benches/seating), and proper lighting. The area planned for use should also have safe access/egress for loading/unloading event equipment and materials. Additionally, the parking and traffic areas should have enough space and be set up to accommodate more than the expected traffic and parking. Ensure the area is also free of hazards that may damage cars.

Equipment/Animals/Materials – For equipment and materials required to operate and set up the event, the school should request documentation of servicing/maintenance records and inspections required by local, state and governmental agencies. The setup should be conducive to safe flow of pedestrians and prevent individuals from becoming injured due to the equipment's moving parts or other hazardous energies (i.e., electrical, hydraulic, heat). Materials should be neatly stored away from event use spaces to avoid potential for property damage or injury to event participants. Additionally, specific use zones and any protective or surfacing materials should be installed/set to prevent damage to property or injuries from falls/impact.

- Inflatables, such as bounce houses, pose some additional risks to the users as well as nearby property. Equipment should be properly inflated, secured to the ground, and include any necessary signage for equipment users and/or their parents/guardians. This may include occupancy/age/height/weight restrictions as well as safe use considerations.

Supervision & Traffic/Parking Controls – Ensuring enough staff/contractors/volunteers are on hand to supervise the event and activities taking place is always a must. Each activity, depending on the risks and potential for injury, may have varying supervision needs. This may also depend on the age range of children using the equipment. Additionally, supervision and crowd control should be in place for the general public that may be in attendance.

Directing traffic and parking is another task that should be well-covered by staff/volunteers to reduce the risk of vehicular incidents. High visibility cones/markers or other methods should be utilized to direct and organize traffic flow and parking. Utilizing or marking off dedicated crosswalks, along with assigning responsible individuals to control pedestrian and vehicular traffic, should be in place as well.

Other Special Event Controls and Considerations

Take time to think about the specific hazards that exist for the event and activities. Here are some specific considerations:

- Coordinate with local fire departments as well as emergency medical services (EMS) whenever there is a risk of fire and/or explosion (i.e., bonfires and fireworks). EMS should also be notified and/or on-site for most special events that present the risk of injury.



– Local and state law enforcement may also need to be notified, or even on-site, depending on the activities taking place. They may also be able to assist with traffic control.

- Staff vs. student games generally present much more potential for injury. This could be from use of equipment or animals, overexertion, as well as a variety of other factors. Staff member injuries that occur while participating in sports and other similar physical activities commonly occur when we, as adults, attempt to physically keep up with the youngsters! This increases the risk of costly workers' compensation injuries.
- **Procedural Controls** – Safety procedures applicable to most of the items mentioned in this article will go a long way in reducing potential for an incident. If responsible individuals are aware of procedures such as safe passenger loading/occupancy limits, traffic flow/parking, and other safety controls, they are much more likely to prevent an incident.

The level of risk and liability that comes with special events can often outweigh the benefits. It is understandable that providing a fun and enjoyable event is imperative to students and the local community; however, sacrifices in the name of safety may be necessary to avoid a severe and costly injury or property damage. Prior to planning your next special event, please reach out to the CM Regent Risk Control department, as well as your school's solicitor, for guidance and recommendations before any major event decisions are made. This will help ensure the necessary controls and considerations are in place.

BLOG

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