

## **Schools Worker Injury Prevention Best Practices**

Listed below are “best practices” every school corporation can undertake to eliminate injuries and their associated costs. The indirect cost of injuries can range from 3 to 12 times the direct costs relating to medical and disability payments, so \$50,000 in annual workers compensation expenses actually costs the organization between \$150,000 and \$600,000. This money could be better targeted toward educational services, particularly when budgets are tight.

### Communicate

- Spend five minutes during cabinet/administration meetings discussing recent injuries, their costs and any trends in losses (type of loss, location of losses, etc.). Expect all department heads to proactively address injuries with staff members.
- Have department heads briefly review injuries incurred, along with corrective actions taken, with staff members during department meetings.
- Communicate personal injury prevention ideas in newsletters, emails and other types of staff communications. Increased awareness and heightened expectations are key goals.
- Focus on the loss drivers that lead to 80% of all injuries among school employees, slips, trips, falls and soft tissue injuries to the back and shoulders.

### Effectively Manage Claims and Medical Costs

- Medical costs continue to increase each year. Establish an effective return-to-work process to mitigate dollars spent on claims once an injury has occurred. Require a detailed list of work restrictions from the attending physician following each visit then assign duties that do not compromise the restrictions. Have employees sign an acknowledgment form indicating that they understand the work restrictions.
- Establish a process to ensure that all claims are reported within 24 to 48 hours. This allows claims administration personnel to take immediate action when needed to mitigate costs. Maintain open lines of communication with claims administration personnel.

### Investigate Incidences to Prevent Repeat Injuries

- Incident investigations are important to determine if corrective actions can be taken to prevent recurrence. As an example, an employee slipped and fell by a water fountain. After a brief investigation, it was determined that the water pressure at the fountain could easily be lowered to reduce splashing and matting could be added below the unit to capture water. No further problems were reported once these corrective actions were taken.
- Documentation gained during an initial incident investigation can be vital in the claims management process since perceptions of what occurred could change over time.

### Provide New Employees with a Safety Orientation

- Provide a safety orientation to all new employees to discuss how individuals in their occupation are injured; how to prevent those injuries; and what to do if they are injured.

Address OSHA-required training items. A new employee safety orientation that addresses these issues is available through your risk management group.

### Address Specific Loss Drivers in Each School Occupation

- Instructional Staff
  - Trip and fall injuries lead to the greatest losses among instructional staff. Some items to discuss: Wearing slip resistant footwear [shoesforcrews.com]; arranging rooms and desks to prevent trips; increasing awareness of tripping hazards such as book bags and children's feet in hallways; reporting torn carpets and door thresholds in disrepair; controlling slippery areas in parking lots; and encourage employees to stop when speaking on cell phones versus walking.
  - Reduce the risk of falls from elevated work areas by reinforcing the policy of no standing on desks and chairs; provide an adequate number of stepstools or Quik Kiks; and remove unstable wood ladders and old stepstools from service.
  - Minimize soft-tissue injuries by discouraging the rearrangement of desks and file cabinets by instructional staff. Establish a procedure for custodians to perform these tasks with appropriate lifting equipment.
  - Reduce injuries from student interactions by insuring that Crisis Prevention Institute training is provided and reinforced.
- Custodial Staff
  - Minimize soft tissue injuries by taking advantage of the custodial post-offer evaluation process offered by the Risk Management Group. This process helps to ensure that perspective custodians are physically capable of performing the job. Ensure that all schools have adequate carts, dollies and two-hand trucks in good condition; purchase pallet lift-assist devices versus standard pallet jacks to share among schools; provide riding snow removal equipment to replace extensive shoveling; and use the Step Saver solar salt delivery system (<http://utstepsaver.com>) to eliminate back and shoulder injuries from lifting bags of solar salt.
  - Reduce the risk of slips and falls by providing/encouraging the use of slip resistant footwear through a corporate shoe program, such as shoesforcrews.com; ensure that custodians wear adequate winter footwear when removing snow; ensure floor care personnel are effectively trained and wet floor signage is available and used.
  - Avoid falls from elevated work areas by removing unstable wood ladders and stepstools from service (replace with Type II fiberglass); ensure that all mezzanines and elevated work areas have guardrails, mid rails and toe boards; and require gutters to be cleaned using ladders versus walking rooflines.
- Transportation Staff
  - Minimize slips and falls by illuminating parking lots in the early morning; ensuring that slip resistant footwear is worn; and establishing best methods for snow removal.
  - Reduce bus/pedestrian incidents and injuries by establishing and enforcing the use of bus lot walkways.

- Cafeteria Staff
  - Reduce slip and fall risks by wearing effective slip resistant footwear [shoesforcrews.com]; ensure wet floor signs are used effectively; provide adequate floor cleaning and maintenance; install adequate matting in dishwashing areas; and identify and eliminate slip and trip hazards such as condensation at freezer door openings, broken drain grates, old piping protruding through floors, etc.
  - Minimize the risk of falls from elevated work areas by training staff to only use Quik Kicks or stepstools. No standing on milk crates, lower shelves, boxes, etc.
  - Reduce soft-tissue injuries by ensuring that mechanisms on cafeteria tables are repaired when needed to reduce back and shoulder injuries when lifting and handling; using material handling devices to lift and transport tables; phasing out heavy, bulky 6 inch pans in favor of 4 inch pans; and lower top storage shelves and raise bottom shelves to reduce reaching and bending.
  - Limit cuts and burns by ensuring that all sharp knives are stored individually; establishing a knife sharpening program; and provide an adequate number of arm gauntlet hot pads and ensure their use.

#### Address Regulatory Compliance Issues

- The risk management group can assist you in identifying regulatory compliance issues and providing training to meet requirements.