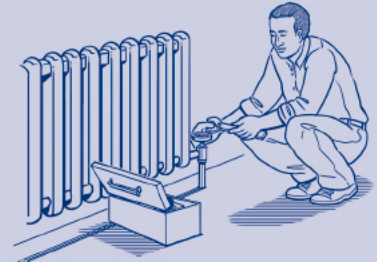


# MAINTAINING SAFETY:

## A Health and Safety Tip Sheet for School Maintenance Staff



Maintenance and facilities staff members keep schools operational, safe, and comfortable for students and staff. From fixing clogged drains to maintaining heating and air conditioning systems, the maintenance staff brings a range of skills to the job. Taking care of your own safety ensures you will be there to continue your important work.

A little planning will go a long way toward making your work environment safer. These three steps will help you get started:

1. Identify job hazards
2. Work towards solutions
3. Follow up and share your successes

### Step 1. Identify job hazards

The chart on the following pages lists many of the common hazards that affect maintenance staff. Use this chart to identify the hazards relevant to your work. Talk to your co-workers to find out if they have similar concerns. Report any hazards to your supervisor.

### Step 2. Work towards solutions

The chart also offers tips for reducing hazards. Develop a plan to implement the changes that are needed. Some suggestions:

- Assess what changes you can make on your own, and what you need your employer or supervisor to do.
- When possible, work together with your school's site safety coordinator, union, and co-workers.
- Share your ideas with your supervisor.
- Workplace hazards can be reduced or eliminated by: (1) removing the hazard (preferable); (2) instituting policies and procedures that reduce the hazard; and/or (3) using personal protective equipment.
- Find out if there are laws that support the change you need.

### \* Did you know?

- School employees as a whole have a higher rate of work-related injuries and illnesses than do other California workers.
- Musculoskeletal injuries and back strain are common among maintenance workers.
- Common accidents include falls, trip and falls.
- Women are especially at risk in this job since most equipment is designed for men.



## Common Job Hazards and Safety Tips for School Maintenance Staff

### Slip and Fall Hazards

Slippery or uneven walking surfaces are the most common causes of slips and falls in schools. Here are some tips to prevent slips and falls:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify the cause of the slippery floor and address the problem to eliminate the hazard.</li> <li>• Clean up spills in your work area immediately.</li> <li>• Use warning signs to keep people away from wet floors.</li> <li>• Always use a ladder or footstool to reach for objects. Never use a box or cart. Ask for help if needed.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When using a ladder, put the ladder on a stable, dry surface. Make sure it is fully open and locked. Do not stand on the top two rungs of the ladder. Ask for ladder safety training. You may also need training in fall protection.</li> <li>• Make sure shelves and storage racks are stable and secured.</li> <li>• Wear shoes with non-skid soles.</li> </ul> |
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### Ergonomic Hazards

These are caused by poor job design that results in sprains, strains, and other wear and tear on the body. Ergonomic hazards include: lifting heavy objects, moving heavy equipment, repeating the same motion over and over again, or using power tools that vibrate.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follow guidelines for proper lifting:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Keep the load close to your body;</li> <li>- Squat and lift with your legs; back straight</li> <li>- Do not twist.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Use a dolly or cart to move heavy objects. Get help if the load is too heavy to lift. Do not rely on back belts.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If moving equipment around, push instead of pull.</li> <li>• Obtain the SASH ergonomics fact sheet for additional practical tips.</li> </ul> |
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### Power Tools and Equipment

Employees who use power tools may be exposed to falling, flying, abrasive, or splashing objects, or to harmful dusts, fumes, mists, vapors, or gases. Broken equipment poses hazards such as moving parts, hot surfaces, and electrical shock.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Check all equipment for loose, broken, or damaged parts before use. Immediately report any damaged equipment, such as frayed wires or electrical cords.</li><li>• Dry your hands before touching electrical equipment. Keep electrical equipment away from water.</li><li>• Disconnect an electrical plug by pulling on the plug, not the cord.</li><li>• Make sure equipment is in the “Power off” position before plugging it into an outlet.</li><li>• Immediately turn off the power if you smell burning plastic or smoke, see sparks, or feel tingling or a shock. Do not use the equipment. Report the problem immediately.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Follow the manufacturers’ instructions for proper maintenance and repair, and replace any equipment that is not safe.</li><li>• Make sure safety guards are in place.</li><li>• Follow steps for proper lock out/tag out when servicing equipment. Turn off and disconnect the equipment. Make sure the source of power has a lock or a tag.</li><li>• Ask your supervisor for appropriate personal protective equipment such as goggles, respirators, and hearing protection.</li><li>• Advocate for CPR training so that you and others can administer CPR to a victim of electrical shock.</li></ul>
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### Poor Indoor Air Quality

A lack of fresh air, poor ventilation, molds, and bacteria can all reduce air quality in schools.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Verify that the heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) system is working well. The HVAC system should be inspected annually.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Inspect ceiling tiles, floors, and walls for leaks or discoloration, and check areas where moisture is commonly generated (kitchen, locker rooms, bathrooms). Make sure there are no signs of water damage.</li></ul>
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## Chemicals

Pesticides or other cleaning chemicals can be very toxic. In performing regular maintenance, there is also a chance you could be exposed to lead or even asbestos. Ninety-six percent of older elementary schools have lead paint. There may be a lead paint even in some of the newer buildings. If surfaces have lead paint, even a small maintenance job like drilling a hole can produce enough lead dust to poison a child. Asbestos can be found in spray-on insulation, ceiling tiles, flooring, or pipe insulation and is only a hazard if it is exposed.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Find out what types of chemicals are present in your work area.</li> <li>• Ask your supervisor to provide less toxic chemicals when possible. For example, use less toxic pesticides, substitute water-based paints for solvent-based paints, or use a plumber's snake instead of drain-cleaning chemicals.</li> <li>• Work with school staff to reduce the need for pesticides. Ask them to clean up food and drinks in classrooms and to inform you of any cracks or crevices that need repair.</li> <li>• Ventilate the area as well as possible.</li> <li>• Make sure all chemicals are labeled and that you have a Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS)* for each product. If you put chemicals into a different container, label the new container.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bring clean clothes and shoes to change into at the end of the work shift so you do not bring any chemicals home. Wash your work clothes separately from other clothes.</li> <li>• Ask your supervisor for chemicals training, including how to use gloves, respirators or other protective gear, as indicated by the MSDS. Be familiar with the emergency plan in case of a chemical accident.</li> <li>• Obtain specific training on hazardous waste management if you handle or store any hazardous waste at your school.</li> <li>• Find out if you could be exposed to lead or asbestos. Before doing work on surfaces that may contain asbestos, find out if you need additional training, personal protective equipment, or other precautions!</li> </ul> |
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**\*What is an MSDS?** An MSDS is a Material Safety Data Sheet prepared by the manufacturer of a chemical or product. It provides detailed information about a chemical, such as how to protect yourself (including the use of gloves, respirators, or other protective gear), how to store the chemical, and what to do in an emergency. Your supervisor must provide the MSDS on request.



### Step 3. Follow up and share your successes

Once you've identified the hazards and solutions, follow up to make sure the changes are implemented. Contact your district's or school's site safety coordinator for help or suggestions. Share your successes with your co-workers and your supervisor.

#### School Site Safety Coordinator

The person in charge of health and safety at your **school** is:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

#### District Resource

The person in charge of health and safety at your **district** is:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Reporting Injuries and Illnesses

It is important to report work-related injuries and illnesses. You cannot be discriminated against or punished for doing so. If you have a work-related injury or illness, contact:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

### \* Safety Pays

Although resources are limited in school districts, some solutions do not require extra money.

Preventing injuries can actually **SAVE** lives and **SAVE** money by:

- reducing workers' compensation claims;
- avoiding loss in productivity when injuries occur; and
- improving employee morale!