CALIFORNIA SCHOOLS
RISK MANAGEMENT

SAFETY MATTERS

RISK MANAGEMENT NEWSLETTER

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BACK TO SCHOOL SAFETY: ENSURING SCHOOL FACILITIES ARE READY FOR THE YEAR

OBJECTIVE To highlight the benefits of facility inspections and provide tips for performing them.

The best way to ensure an effective and efficient safety inspection is to have a comprehensive checklist specific to your facility. Checklists are only beneficial when followed, adhered to, and carried out. Not only do they prevent vague inspections and keep facility management and school administrators from missing important aspects, but they also provide a step-by-step method for analyzing machinery, workspaces, and safety and health practices and procedures.

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BENEFITS OF INSPECTIONS

- They allow people to work systematically through the workplace, keeping the process focused, organized, and on task
- Written records provide accountability for those in charge of safety and health
- Written records also allow an outside agency to assess your safety and health guidelines and procedures, offering a clear record of regular and thorough inspections that confirm a commitment to a safe working and learning environment
- A systematic procedure ensures student and employee safety and well-being is a priority, which improves campus and workplace safety culture and gives students and employees confidence in safety standards

Sometimes the problem with such a simple and repetitive tool is that it can feel overly nit-picky and detail-oriented. Many workers are resistant to checking boxes for tasks they believe they can do without adding this tedious step. That is, until they overlook a detail.

WHY THE FACILITY INSPECTION CHECKLIST ISN'T OVERKILL

Overconfidence can lead to complacency, which can then lead to missing small, routine details. And it's those details that can be the difference between "just another day" and a disaster.

Airplane pilots, medical personnel, first responders, and Cal-Tech JPL Engineers (rocket scientists) have all developed checklists for their respective fields when it comes to safety in their industry. All have education and experience at their jobs and thus understand that sometimes being very good at a job and well trained can sometimes make us forget the basics.

ITEMS TO INCLUDE IN YOUR INDOOR AND OUTDOOR FACILITY EVALUATIONS

- **Indoor Area**
  - —Ceilings and lighting
  - —Walls, interior conditions, and fire safety
  - —Floors
  - —Interior sinks/fountains/restrooms
- **Outdoor Area**
  - —Hardscape and grass areas
  - —Playgrounds/athletic areas/outdoor structures
  - —Fountains
  - —Gates/fencing/handrails

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GETTING BUY-IN FOR FACILITY INSPECTION CHECKLIST

In testing checklists in hospitals, it became evident that in top-down bureaucratic systems, this safety measure wasn't as likely to work. People don't like being told what to do, especially when they don't understand the value.

The important element, then, is to explain why the checklist is important. People are far more likely to follow procedure that they themselves see as a valuable use of their valuable time.

Ideas to gather stakeholder input

- Create site maps showing the facilities and needs with estimated costs
- Send surveys and questionnaires to the safety committee for expanded input
- Host open forums and workshops to gather community input
- Coordinate outreach efforts with community groups, unions, and service organizations

Even if you get your team on board with implementing the general facility safety inspection checklist, the hard truth is that checklists can get boring. And even the most well-meaning staff member can get distracted or glaze over.

Keeping your facilities inspection checklist and its execution fresh and lively

- Task different staff members with completing checks
- Make your checklist colorful
- Review checklist annually for new construction or changes to facilities
- When possible, switch the order of list items

RESOURCES

Sample Facility Checklist
CASH – FIT Guidebook

This California Schools JPA fact sheet is not intended to be exhaustive. The discussion and best practices suggested herein should not be regarded as legal advice. Readers should pursue legal counsel or contact their insurance providers to gain more exhaustive advice.