CALIFORNIA SCHOOLS
RISK MANAGEMENT

SAFETY MATTERS

RISK MANAGEMENT NEWSLETTER

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FIRE PREVENTION IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

OBJECTIVE To reinforce preventative measures in areas that are prone to fire exposure in schools K-12.

Fire departments respond to an average of 3,200 structure fires in schools annually resulting in $37 million in property damage. The National Fire Protection Association found the top four causes of these fires include:

1. intentionally set (arson)
2. cooking equipment
3. playing with a heat source
4. heating equipment

More than 70% of school fires occur between 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., when students are most likely in the building. Your school should have a formal fire safety plan in place which includes an evacuation protocol to ensure students and staff are not in immediate danger. However, the best response plan is to prevent fires before they start. Summarized below are school departments or areas that are more likely to result in fire. Review these carefully with staff to ensure procedures are in place for a successful fire prevention program.

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LABORATORIES	• Your best defense is establishing a chemical hygiene plan and properly training staff. Establish labeling and storage requirements, inventory all materials, and ensure date-sensitive materials are discarded appropriately. • Store flammable and combustible liquids in a flammable storage cabinet. • Maintain good housekeeping, limit the storage of combustibles (paper, cardboard, etc.) and maintain separation between combustible materials and ignition sources. • Keep Safety Data Sheets (SDSs) available and review them with staff to ensure they know the physical and health hazards, including precautions to stay safe.
CLASSROOMS	• Keep combustible materials away from heaters. • Evacuation routes should be posted and drills practiced. • Check electrical appliances and cords regularly and disconnect where practical. • Doorways should be kept clear and trash receptacle contents disposed of daily. • Do not cover or decorate the classroom door, making it difficult to identify in an emergency. • Protect unused outlets in kindergarten and lower grades with safety plugs. • Limit the amount of decorative materials (drapes, hangings, curtains, drops, including Christmas trees) to no more than 10%.
KITCHEN/HOME ECONOMICS	• Maintenance of the fire suppression system, exhaust hoods, filters and ducts should be done by a properly trained, qualified and certified person at least every 6 months. • Clean dryer lint traps, filters and duct work leading into vents, fans and air conditioners.

INDUSTRIAL ARTS	• Never overload circuits or outlets.
	• Only use approved extension cords on a temporary basis.
	• Practice safe compressed gas cylinder storage which includes:
	  ◦ Secure cylinders in an upright position via chair at top and bottom third of the cylinder wherever possible.
	  ◦ Separate flammable from oxidizing gases by a minimum of 20 feet or a 30-minute fire wall at least 4 feet in height.
	  ◦ Properly label cylinders for contents and hazards, and separate full from empty cylinder storage.
	• Provide waste cans that are UL Listed and FM Approved for disposal of oil soaked and paint rags.

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INDUSTRIAL ARTS (CONT'D)	• Use UL Listed and FM Approved safety cans for storing small quantities (5 gallons or less) of flammable liquids and/or to safely dispense flammable liquids. • Ground flammable liquid storage containers (55 gallon drums). • Always bond flammable liquid dispensing containers to a grounded source when transferring flammable liquids from the storage container to the dispensing container. • Ensure approved and properly designed ventilation systems are employed for dust collection as well as painting operations. • Create a scheduled maintenance plan. • Clean up overspray residues frequently. Supply suitable and easily accessible fire extinguishers, fire detection, and suppression systems.
STORAGE/BOILER ROOMS	• Do not store flammable or combustible materials within 3 feet of an ignition source such as a gas-fueled water heater. • As a best practice, store flammable liquids in a UL Listed and FM Approved flammable storage cabinet. • Service heating equipment annually.
OFFICES AND HALLWAYS	• Keep hallways clear of storage materials, allowing for easy evacuation in an emergency. • Limit the amount of artwork and teaching materials placed on walls.
ALL AREAS	• Conduct regular documented safety inspections. • Follow all handling and storage requirements listed on chemical labels. • Conduct drills to ensure the safety of staff and students. • Maintain fire protection and suppression systems using a state-qualified contractor or qualified employee. • Provide fire extinguishers and employee training on the proper use of fire extinguishers for their area. • Specify smoking/non-smoking areas for faculty and staff. • Implement Hot Work, Sprinkler Impairment and Fire Watch procedures as necessary. • Properly manage and inspect vacant buildings as if they were occupied and employ a security service to monitor vacant building activity during non-operating hours. • Remove graffiti as soon as possible, report and investigate the cause of vandalism and other activities.

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.