

Service Associate Q&A

EMC's Mark Neubauer talks about strategies to avoid accidents in schools



Mark Neubauer is the commercial lines underwriting supervisor at EMC



Q. *What are some safety issues or related maintenance projects schools should address this time of year?*

A. The summer months are a great time to make sure your sidewalks and parking lots are ready for students and staff to come back to school. Examine sidewalks and parking lots for low areas, cracks, unevenness, holes and weather damage. By replacing, patching or grinding down damaged areas, you can decrease the likelihood of slip-and-fall incidents and make walking safer for pedestrian traffic. Make sure all exterior and interior lights are working, and if necessary, replace burnt out lightbulbs or broken fixtures.

Another safety issue to evaluate is student drop-off and pick-up procedures. You should assess:

- Pedestrian-vehicle accidents (or close calls);
- Traffic patterns and directional signs to improve traffic flow;
- Paint on streets and in parking lots; and,
- Tree and shrub trimming to improve sight lines.

Q. *What are common accidents in schools? What can school leaders do to try and prevent these accidents?*

A. Slip-and-fall incidents and overexertion are the leading causes of school injuries. Faculty and staff, students and the general public are all at risk for slip-and-fall injuries.

Overexertion injuries are common with custodians, food service and maintenance personnel.

School leaders can help reduce the likelihood of these injuries by taking the following actions:

- Inspect sidewalks and parking lots and promptly repair any damage;
- Formalize a procedure to clear water, snow and ice in pedestrian paths;
- Require food service staff to wear slip-resistant shoes;
- Remind all staff to wear appropriate slip-resistant shoes during inclement weather;
- Provide the proper material handling equipment for custodial and kitchen staff;
- Do not allow staff to use chairs, tables or desks to access out-of-reach items; and,
- Store materials and food in smaller, lighter containers to help staff avoid lifting heavy loads.

Q. *What role can school board members play in ensuring safe schools?*

A. School board members can help keep schools safe by promoting safety in everything they approve. Creating a consistent and effective safety-focused culture at school would be very difficult without the leadership of the board. School board members should always consider the impact of their decisions on

the safety of staff, students and the public. Some safety items have an associated cost but the return on the investment can be found in insurance premiums, substitute teacher budgets, employee morale, staff performance, student achievement, human resources time and district reputation.

Q. *If you could give school leaders one piece of insurance (or safety) advice, what would it be?*

A. Start. Don't assume that someone else is responsible. Building a culture of safety means everyone is responsible. Begin with simple fixes that make a difference. Comply with recommendations from loss-control experts and strive to be safer each and every day. ■

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