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# RISKmanager

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# Are staff shortages impacting WORKPLACE SAFETY?

By Kyle Stewart

Has staff turnover, difficulty filling vacant positions or a change in job duties caused your safety program and initiatives to take a back seat? The inability to fill vacant positions has led to supply shortages or delayed delivery of supplies. While many organizations can delay a shipment because of staff or supply shortages, schools do not have the option to delay educating our youth.

A lot has changed following the pandemic. Staffing shortages and operational modifications have cut into the time and resources previously allocated to your safety program. While staff shortages may be out of your immediate control, schools should hit the reset button to revive risk control initiatives and prevent work-related injuries that can cause additional staff vacancies.

## Potential Risks

Factors attributed to staff shortages impacting your safety program may include:

- **Wearing of “Multiple Hats”** – Staffing shortages from resignations, retirements or internal transfers forced existing staff to assume additional duties. The difficulties filling vacant positions are causing some duties, typically safety-related, to be pushed further down the “to-do list” as there are only so many hours in a workday.
- **Staff Turnover** – A significant portion of the workforce elected to retire sooner than they had expected following the pandemic. When this occurred, a wealth of safety experience left, forcing many educational entities to keep their safety program/safety committee afloat.
- **Assignment of Work Task Duties** – Staff shortages can lead to fatigue, both mental and physical; or cause staff to take shortcuts and jeopardize their safety to save time.
- **Inexperience/Unfamiliarity** – With the departure of experienced staff, it is possible the employee who volunteered or was assigned may have limited experience with the work task hazard(s), let alone the role as a safety leader.

## Best Practices/Actionable Items

Below are best practices your organization can use to balance staffing challenges and reduce work-related injuries:

### Prioritize Safety

- Safety should be priority No. 1. Don’t allow other duties or deadlines to take precedence over safety.
- Preventing work-related injuries is an effective tool against additional staffing issues—if an employee is injured, they can’t report to work or perform assigned duties.
- Emphasize safety on the first day of employment, don’t wait for a larger group to be hired to conduct new-hire safety training.

### Create a Safety Succession Plan

- If you don’t already have one, a safety succession plan should be created to pass the torch without a disruption in operational safety practices.
- Designate personnel who will assume the primary safety duties. Select staff who are familiar and actively participate in your school’s workplace safety program.
- Familiarity with your workplace safety program will reduce the learning curve if staff members are forced to assume the duties unexpectedly.

### Delegate Safety Responsibilities

- Safety should never be the sole responsibility of one staff member, even if a workplace safety committee is established.
- Each staff member has a role in safety; delegate safety responsibilities to multiple individuals. This approach permits all staff to be engaged in your safety program.
- The challenge is to identify individual(s) who will lead by example and effectively communicate safety awareness

### Don't Delay Safety Training

- Don't wait for professional development trainings scheduled prior to the start of the school year; consider any opportunities throughout the school year.
- Consider alternative safety training methods, including on-site training, use of virtual training modules or allocating time during existing meetings to discuss safety.
- Avoid thinking safety training must be a designated duration. Allocating a few minutes each week or month is more effective than training on one select date for an hour.

### Operational Modifications

- If staff vacancies require staff to perform alternate duty work assignments, provide hands-on training on specific work task procedure(s), instruction on any equipment and close supervision by a qualified staff member.
- Review operational changes implemented because of staff shortages. Are the modifications effective or have they contributed to an increase in work-related injuries?
- Supervisors should allocate time to monitor and enforce safe work practices. Engagement with staff is required to determine where skills are lacking, or safety gaps exist from inexperience.
- If building alteration/renovation projects are on pause awaiting delivery of supplies, conduct periodic hazard identification inspections of these areas.

While staffing shortages may be out of your direct control, your school can take steps to maintain your existing workforce by reducing preventable work-related injuries. Rather than focus on the challenges attributed to staffing, consider this an opportunity to refresh risk control initiatives to prevent work-related injuries. In the end, employees and their supervisors will benefit from an increase in safety awareness communications.

## BLOG

Learn more about managing risk at [cmregent.com/blog/](https://cmregent.com/blog/).



# WATER LEAKAGE EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLAN

*By Jake Ruziecki*

With the spring thaw soon upon us, this is an excellent time to turn the spotlight on a Water Leakage Emergency Response Plan (ERP). Water leaks can occur from a number of causes, including significant rainfall, a leaking or burst water pipe, pipe freezing, sprinkler system activation, or damaged roofing or windows.

## Risks

Water leakage and subsequent water damage are one of the most significant losses educational institutions could face, often impacting electrical systems, boilers and other vital building systems. These water damage events lead to significant downtime of buildings, causing additional difficulties from having to relocate students, make transportation adjustments, repair damaged equipment, and try to recover lost records.

To improve response time and minimize the effects of water leaks, your ERP should include:

- **Emergency Contacts** – This should include the personnel tasked with handling water leaks. Be sure to include who is responsible if a leak occurs overnight or after hours, and emergency personnel if any people or equipment are in immediate danger. Approved contractors should also be listed in your contact details to improve response time. This should include electrical contractors, restoration contractors, fire protection contractors, plumbing contractors, and all other entities included during the restoration process (equipment rentals, equipment repairs or fuel supply).
- **Documentation** – Your ERP may be slightly different for each building. Be sure to include maps of your facilities for each location, and pictures or illustrations to help simplify the location of shut-off valves.
- **Training** – All personnel involved in the ERP should receive training on an annual basis. The training should include the responsibilities that each staff member is to take. The trainer should test the trainee to verify they understand their responsibilities.
  - **Contact Information** – The Administrator of the program should review the contact information of each personnel to ensure that it is up to date in accuracy.



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## Best Practices/Actionable Items

The following best practices are provided to proactively reduce the risk and severity of water damage events:

- **Inspection** – Routinely inspect plumbing, sprinkler systems and other related equipment for damage, leaks or aging plumbing.



- **Labeling** – Each building's shut-off valves should be identified and labeled for the personnel responding to the leak. This should include primary system shut-off valves, secondary (sectional valves) and localized valves on equipment.
- **Drainage** – Roof drains, exterior drainage and interior drainage should be free of obstructions and debris. It is beneficial to test these drains at least annually and more often in areas where vegetation, leaves, tree nuts, or other debris are more prone to accumulate to ensure they are completely free of obstructions.
- **Testing** – All shut-off valves noted in the ERP should be tested annually to ensure their functionality in the event of a water leak.

Establishing a formal Emergency Response Plan will help reduce the risk of water damage and improve response time in the event of a water leak. For further assistance or evaluation of your existing Emergency Response Plan for water leaks, you can contact our Risk Control Department at CM Regent Insurance Company.

# CONTAMINATION: THE INVISIBLE HAZARD

By Edgar Boord



There are many hazards out there that are unsuspecting in nature. The majority of them are either due to individual behaviors/actions or are a visible physical hazard. Let's take a look at a category of hazard that is both unsuspecting and often invisible to the human eye. Contamination is applicable to a few different areas; mainly food contamination, chemical contamination, human illnesses and transmissible diseases. These issues may not result in a broken bone or pulled muscle in your back but can have severe and even fatal outcomes.

## Risks

- **Food-borne infection/food poisoning** can include Salmonella, E. Coli, Listeria, Toxoplasmosis, Campylobacter and Norovirus. These can come from:
  - Undercooked, unwashed, improperly stored and spoiled foods.
  - Poor hygiene/cleanliness and cross-contamination.
  - Family and consumer science, as well as culinary programs that have hybrid cooking and food preparation areas along with a classroom setting. This allows for potential cross-contamination issues.
- **Chemical contamination** can affect surfaces, foods and parts of the human body that are contaminated by chemicals.
  - Chemical contamination can result in acute and chronic health issues from irritants, toxic substances and chemicals with other harmful attributes.
  - One of the most frequent causes of chemical contamination in schools is the use of microwaves and refrigerators (for consumption) in chemical storage areas.
- **Transmissible human diseases/illnesses** can include a wide range of issues from everyday colds and the flu to severe infectious diseases and other bloodborne pathogens.
  - Can be spread through air-borne particulate, skin-to-skin contact, contaminated surfaces and contact with contaminated blood or other bodily fluids.

## Best Practices/Actionable Items

**Sanitization** – Proper hygiene and cleanliness can go a long way in reducing contaminated surfaces, including your hands. With the arrival of COVID-19, we've all taken extra steps to increase sanitization and proper hygiene; however, it is important to maintain this awareness when handling chemicals and food or interacting with others in a shared workspace. Always sanitize surfaces where food is being prepared. The same goes for frequently touched surfaces and equipment. As for yourself, the CDC recommends washing your hands after handling anything that could be contaminated, scrubbing your hands for approximately 20 seconds. If soap and water is not available, use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.

**Storing Foods** – Always adhere to the food manufacturer's recommendations for storage temperature, environment and shelf life. Making sure perishable foods are properly stored as soon as possible after use can assist in reducing potential for food-borne illnesses.

**Preparing Foods** – Make certain that preparation surfaces and areas are not only sanitized and cleaned, but also free of the chemicals initially used to sanitize them. Before handling food, be sure to thoroughly wash your hands. If you are feeling ill and are unable to take time off, inform your supervisor to see if it is safe for you to continue to prepare food, or otherwise have you reassigned to another area away from the food-prep area. After handling a food with increased risk of cross-contamination, be sure to wash your hands and

dry them with a clean towel before handling other foods, equipment, or touching any surfaces. These foods can include meats, unwashed produce, dairy products, and dirty or contaminated liquids. Lastly, be certain to thoroughly (and safely) clean any equipment, such as knives or food slicers, after use.

**Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)** – One of the best methods for avoiding or preventing the spread of any kind of contamination is to create a barrier. Gloves, face masks, protective eyewear/face shields and chemical splash aprons are a few types of PPE that provide protection from contaminants, illnesses and pathogens. Be sure to select the proper PPE for the hazard and always check to make sure it is in good condition for use. After handling bodily fluids that may contain bloodborne pathogens, it is important to make sure gloves are removed without contaminating yourself and others. For proper glove removal procedures, check out “The Dangers of Bloodborne Pathogens” article in the Summer 2019 *Risk Manager* newsletter.

[Click here to view the newsletter.](#)



**Chemical Contamination** – Be sure to inspect and wear the appropriate PPE before handling chemicals, including your everyday cleaners. If there is potential for a chemical to splash during the task, wear appropriate clothing (i.e., long sleeves) as well as PPE such as a splash apron, protective face shield, and gloves that are suitable for the chemical being handled (i.e., latex vs. nitrile vs. vinyl). The task should also be performed in a controlled environment with any necessary containment, non-porous surfaces and safety controls, such as a fire extinguisher and emergency eyewash station/shower. If a chemical gives off harmful vapors or fumes, the task should be completed under a ventilation hood with appropriate ventilation capabilities. After finishing tasks involving chemicals, be sure to clean contaminated surfaces and thoroughly wash your hands and any contaminated parts of your body. Always be sure to put chemical containers back in their designated storage area.

Refrigerators, microwaves, and other food/beverage appliances should never be kept in a chemical storage area. This includes chemistry and maintenance/custodial storage areas.

## Conclusion

Contamination and similar hazards could affect anyone and can be found throughout the workplace. Contamination is often not an issue that can be identified visually. For this reason, preventative measures and proper procedures are the best way to minimize risks to you, your co-workers, students and others who may come into contact with contamination hazards. It is important to take the time to think about potential for contamination to occur before starting a task and consider the actions that should be taken to minimize that potential.



**Have a safety question?**

Ask our experts at  
[cmregent.com/risk-control/ask/](https://cmregent.com/risk-control/ask/)

References: CM Regent Risk Manager Newsletter – Summer 2019  
*Risk Manager* “The Dangers of Bloodborne Pathogens”



# Use of Tools at Heights

## AND PREVENTING STRUCK-BY OBJECT INJURIES

By Mark Nease

Staff may be required to perform overhead work during classroom instruction time. IT staff may route data cables through the ceilings, maintenance staff may change light bulbs or work on overhead fixtures, and contractors may perform ceiling or roof work.

With overhead work comes the hazard of people on the floor possibly being struck by a dropped object.

Often, this hazard is overlooked or not seen as dangerous because we trust that the person performing the overhead work will not drop their tools. Staff may also overlook the hazard when they use tools that weigh less than a couple pounds since there is a false perception that a “lightweight” tool can cause little harm to a person regardless of the dropped height.

Now that we know this risk is real, it’s good to investigate injury risks and best practices to prevent an incident.

### Risks

Becoming struck by a dropped object is simply one risk, but with varying degrees of consequences. A person can suffer anywhere from a minor injury requiring first aid to a severe injury or even a fatality due to being struck-by a dropped object. A focus should be placed on knowing that such a risk exists and then incorporating preventative controls to avert an accident.

### BLOG

Learn more about employee safety at [cmregent.com/blog/](https://cmregent.com/blog/).

### Best Practices/Actionable Item

- **Scheduling** – Try to schedule tasks requiring overhead work when the surrounding area will be unoccupied. Perform pre-planned contractor work during the summertime or during holiday breaks.
- **Tethered Tools** – Insist contractors and other staff who perform this work use tools that can be tethered. The American National Standards Institute (ANSI) came out with a standard in 2018 called ANSI/ISEA 121, which pertains to equipment solutions that reduce the risk of dropped objects at their source (the overhead work position). Staff performing overhead work should exercise the precautions in the ANSI 121 standard. The standard gives “fall protection for tools” guidelines, including anchor attachment points, tool attachment points, tool tethering options and containers to transport material.
- **Signage** – Post signage to alert people of overhead work and use barrier tape to tape off zones in which people would be in danger of becoming struck by a dropped object.
- **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)** – People, especially contractors, may be required to incorporate a hardhat PPE program to reduce the risk of a serious head injury should they get struck by a dropped tool. Such a program typically exists during building renovation projects.

Often not considered, but certainly a safety hazard, is the free handling of basic hand tools, such as screwdrivers, wrenches or pliers, when working at heights. A dropped tool striking the ground can result in a damaged tool, but a dropped tool striking a person can result in a serious injury. Take time today to consider tasks that involve working at heights with hand tools and how you can take measures to contain those tools to prevent them from dropping and possibly injuring someone.



# Community Use of Fitness Center

By Derek Neubauer

## RECOGNIZE THE RISK

Because schools are often considered “hubs” of the community, administration is constantly looking for ways school facilities can be used by community members. Fitness centers, which are growing in popularity throughout school buildings, are often the area where the community could get the most use. Improving one’s fitness and health is obviously a positive activity; however, fitness centers provide risk exposures from workers’ compensation and general liability perspectives.

The risk exposures for staff and the public who use fitness centers need to be realized and controlled, including the individual’s: 1. physical ability, 2. health, and 3. pre-existing conditions.

The following are some controls that should be taken to reduce the potential for issues developing from the use of fitness centers and fitness equipment:

1. Establish an **application form** that must be completed by anyone who wants to use the fitness center and equipment. The application form should also require information on the individual’s medical insurance coverage and be kept on file.
2. Create and use a **health questionnaire form** as part of the application. Should there be any indication of a health issue or pre-existing physical condition, the person should be required to obtain documentation from their physician indicating any physical limitations the person may have in using weights, exercise equipment, and participating in any exercise program.
3. Develop a **waiver and release of liability form** that must be signed with the application by anyone who wants to use the fitness center and equipment. The form should also include a hold-harmless in the school district’s favor.

The school district’s solicitor should be involved in the wording and information provided for the application, health questionnaire and waiver/release of liability form. An individual should not be permitted to use the fitness center until the above three items are completed and on file.

The fitness center should only be used while supervised by a qualified staff member. This staff member should be trained in the use of the equipment, be able to assist/train individuals who are approved and monitor the use of equipment. When not scheduled for use, access to the fitness center and equipment should be prohibited.



Also, the fitness center should have both a hardline phone and an AED device. These should be readily accessible in an area which is known within or near the fitness center. All equipment should be inspected and maintained per the manufacturer’s recommendations, with records of inspection and maintenance kept on file for each piece of equipment. The development and implementation of appropriate management controls, like those indicated above, will help reduce the potential for injury to individuals using the fitness center.



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**CM**  
**REGENT™**

**INSURANCE COMPANY**

300 Sterling Parkway, Suite 100

Mechanicsburg, PA 17050

Toll-free 844-480-0709

[CMRegent.com](http://CMRegent.com)



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