Environmental Safety & Security in Schools

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Creating safe and secure learning environments is a paramount objective of school systems. When learning environments are safe and secure, schools achieve better outcomes. Implementing key measures can have a positive impact on school climate and help to keep the school facilities in good condition.

Safety & Security

- **Safety** is the state of being "safe:" the condition of being protected against physical, social, spiritual, financial, political, emotional, occupational, psychological, educational or other types of failure, damage, error, accidents, harm or event which could be considered non-desirable. Safety can also be defined as the control of recognized hazards to achieve an acceptable level of risk.
- **Security** is the degree of protection to safeguard people against danger, damage, loss and crime.

Design Factors that Impact Security

- Manage access to the facility:
    - Exterior doors remain locked during school hours, and interior doors have working locks.
    - Visitors check in at office upon arrival.
    - Natural surveillance opportunities:
        - Staff able to monitor exterior grounds from inside facility.
    - Adequate and appropriate lighting:
        - Exterior lighting in parking lots and around entrances/exits.
        - Interior lighting in bathrooms, hallways, locker rooms.
    - Staff ID badges and "smart badges" or key fobs for staff to unlock doors.
    - Duress alarms or direct communication links to emergency services should be in good working order.
    - Metal detectors or other technology surveillance at school entrances.

Other Safety Concerns

- Chemical Safety
    - Classrooms, science labs, custodial closets and storage areas:
        - The most common safety issue observed in elementary classrooms involves the storage of hazardous and toxic chemicals in cabinets below the sink, often next to party supplies.
        - There should be an up-to-date inventory of all chemicals and products present and in storage.
        - All chemicals, cleaners and products should be stored properly and labeled.

        - There should be local exhaust ventilation where chemicals are used or stored, including custodial closets, vocational shops, labs, darkrooms, art rooms, copy rooms and print shops.
        - Combustible and flammable liquids and materials should be clearly labeled and stored in approved safety containers.
        - Appropriate fire extinguishers should be readily available.

- Electrical Safety
    - Science labs, technology areas and industrial technology are areas that require enhanced electrical safety.
    - Outlets near water sources or in damp areas should have ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCI) and appliances such as refrigerators, microwaves, water coolers, computers, printers, copiers and portable tools should have three-prong grounding plugs.
    - Any hazardous equipment should be equipped with a functional guard and have appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) available.
    - Electrical cords should not create slip, trip and fall hazards, and cords that are damaged in any way (e.g., frayed, spliced or taped) should be discarded.
    - Electrical loads in labs and science rooms should be appropriate for service.
    - Circuit breaker switches and disconnect switches should be clearly labeled and indicate what circuits / areas they control.
- Slips, Trips and Falls
    - Design flaws, facility deterioration and occupancy-related concerns can create hazards.
    - Exterior lighting and lighting in all areas and walkways should be adequate and functioning.
    - Any blinking fluorescent tubes or non-working light bulbs should be replaced.
    - Emergency lighting should be provided and maintained in required areas.

Playground Safety

- Children with asthma might receive treatment from the school nurse prior to physical activity, to prevent an asthma attack.
- A playground monitor is always present with some form of communication.
- Equipment should be properly spaced to prevent injuries.
- Bar spacing, step height and padding should be placed appropriately and meet US Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) standards.

For additional tips on environmental health and safety in schools, visit PEHSU.net. You can also explore more factsheets to help you create a safer school environment for students, teachers and everyone in the school.

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