

SCHOOL SAFETY ***(Identifying Potential Hazards)***

Depending on the type of crisis a school may face, the classroom can contain numerous potential hazards. In some parts of Missouri earthquakes are a very real possibility, while tornadoes, fires and armed intruders are possible everywhere. Taking the time to correct potentially dangerous situations in the classroom prior to a crisis occurring will assist in preventing further injuries in the event of a disaster. When a crisis response plan is developed, identification and correction of potential hazards can save lives.

Ask the following questions:

- 1. Do classrooms have unsecured bookshelves, wall shelves, freestanding cabinets, TV monitors and VCRs, rolling pianos, hanging plants, heavy objects stored in high locations, pictures or other objects blocking the view from the outside of the building?**

A check of the classrooms may discover several potential problems waiting to occur. Objects such as those listed above, especially in the event of earthquakes, could cause serious injuries to students and faculty members.

- 2. Are toxic, corrosive and flammable materials securely stored to withstand falling and breaking? Are warning signs posted in areas housing hazardous materials? Are appliances (e.g., water or space heaters) securely anchored? Are fire extinguishers checked according to fire code requirements? Are fire extinguishers secured against falling? Are office cabinets secured against falling? Do drawers have adequate latches to prevent contents from spilling? Are "portable" buildings properly tied to foundations? Are automatic gas shut-off valves installed? Are light fixtures adequately supported?**

Windows, especially large pane windows, are prevalent hazards throughout the school. Shatter resistant plastic film will hold together fragments of windowpanes that crack in an earthquake. Plexiglas and similar products will not shatter during earthquakes, either. Even if the school is located in an area of Missouri that is not concerned with the possibility of an earthquake, no matter the cause, broken glass can cause serious injuries.

Identifying potential hazards along school evacuation routes is important to developing procedures for a quick and orderly evacuation. A thorough assessment of the hazards likely to be encountered en route from the classroom and other activity rooms to safe areas is imperative. Although many of these hazards are identified for earthquake situations, they can also apply for many other instances.

Consult with the local fire department to assist with identifying these potential hazards. Points to consider are:

3. Do hallways and/or doors contain glass panels?

4. Are these panels of safety (tempered) glass?

Fire code requirements for safety glass along evacuation routes should be checked.

5. Do lockers, bookshelves, and other storage units line hallways?

Following an earthquake, hallways may be cluttered with debris from ceilings, fallen light fixtures, broken glass, and toppled storage units. Students should be advised to anticipate these hazards.

6. Is lighting dependent on electricity rather than sunlight?

If the lighting system fails in enclosed hallways or stairways, resulting darkness will make it difficult to navigate safely. If emergency (battery-powered) lights are available, secured against falling.

7. Does the school building have elevators?

Elevators are extremely vulnerable to damage from earthquakes. Post signs near the elevators prohibiting their use in the event of fire and earthquakes. If your school has students with physical impairments, there should be a plan for getting them down (or up) steps in the event of an emergency.

8. Do building exit routes pass through canopies or porch-like structures?

In the event of an earthquake, columns supporting arcades or porches may fail and roof overhangs may sag or fall.

9. Is the school building faced with parapets, balconies or cornices?

Roof tiles, parapets, balconies, cornices, and other facades and decorations may fall during an earthquake. Because they have been weakened, these components may fall after the ground stops shaking.

10. Are gas, sewer and power lines near outdoor assembly areas?

In the event the school must be evacuated, it is important not to evacuate to an area where these items may be located. Evacuating to these areas may result in added confusion for repair crews, students and an increased chance of injuries.

It is also important to identify potential hazards in the neighborhood surrounding the school. The area in which the school is located may have businesses, factories and structures that should be taken into consideration when developing your crisis response plan. Although the school cannot control what happens at another location, understanding the potential problems these places can pose for your school may affect such things as evacuation routes. Take the time now to identify potential factors that can affect the school or at least the response plan.

11. Facilities containing toxic, chemically reactive, and radioactive materials (manufacturers and users, e.g., gas stations); high-voltage power lines; transportation routes of vehicles carrying hazardous materials (freeways, railroad tracks; major underground gas, and oil pipelines; underground utility vaults and aboveground transformers; multi-story buildings vulnerable to damage or collapse; water towers, tanks?

Many of the above-listed potential hazards are not readily apparent. Help in identifying their location may be obtained from the fire department, city/county public works office, and building inspection department. Through early identification of potential hazards the crisis response will be able to address possible contingencies which will help minimize panic and injury in the event of a disaster.

When identifying potential hazards it is easy to overlook a very important one. Often classroom windows are covered with posters, essays and window decorations. Of course these items in and of themselves are not a hazard; however, the way they are displayed could be a factor in the response plan. In the event there is an armed intruder, window coverings could hamper law enforcement response by obstructing their view into classrooms. In addition if the plan (or the crisis) calls for students to exit through windows, these decorations could become a hindrance in their attempts to escape. From a preventive standpoint, without clear view out the classroom windows, teachers (and students) might not observe activity that could develop into a safety issue for the school. It is not being suggested that windows be completely clear of decorations; rather to examine if window decoration could not be displayed in such a manner as to not obstruct view.

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FILE: EB-AP1

Note: The reader is encouraged to review policies and/or forms for related information in this administrative area.

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Clinton School District #124, Clinton, Missouri