

Best Practices for **Schools**



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Introduction

This publication provides useful information regarding strategies and practices employed by Ohio school districts in achieving successful employee safety and health, and workers' compensation management. You should not consider this publication a complete and exhaustive list of all possible employee safety- and health-management strategies. BWC's Division of Safety & Hygiene obtained these best practice strategies through interviews with administrators of school districts throughout Ohio.

We have grouped these strategies and practices into one of the following categories:

- Management commitment;
- Employee involvement;
- Communication;
- Education and training;
- Injury reporting and treatment;
- Return to work (transitional work practices);
- Safety audits and inspections;
- Safety programs.

Also included in this publication are sections that highlight the following:

- Challenges — What challenges and obstacles do these and other schools face when attempting to manage employee safety;
- Solutions — What strategies may help overcome some of the challenges and obstacles;
- Resources — Where to turn for information and assistance.

Benefits of managing employee safety

On average, the schools that participated in our study achieved the following results:

- A 14.8 percent increase in payroll;
- A 34.6 percent reduction in premium;
- A 78 percent reduction in claims;
- One school district had zero claims in three out of the last five years;
- One school district went from 45-percent penalty rated in to group rated (41-percent credit rated) by devoting a significant effort to its safety process. This school saw a 54-percent reduction in premium. As a result, it paid approximately \$151,000 less in premium. This same school district also experienced a 70-percent reduction in claims;
- All school districts experienced reductions in injury frequency and severity;
- Each school district credited the implementation of safety-related communication systems to improve overall communications throughout the districts. See the Communication section on page 5 for specific details;
- All school districts reported heightened employee awareness of safety issues, both on and off the job;
- Several school administrators stated they believe the improvements in the employee safety and health process have had a positive impact on employee attitudes and morale.

Demographics

- All of the schools included in this study were group rated with an average 42-percent credit rating. Group-rating status equates to significant reductions in workers' compensation premium costs.
- The schools have an average of 620 employees, ranging from 140 to more than 1,000 employees.
- On average, each school district operates 12 buildings.
- Most schools are members of the Ohio School Boards Association (OSBA); although some are members of other associations, such as the Ohio Schools Council.
- The person with chief responsibility for safety varied widely, but tended to be someone with the title of business manager, operations manager or facilities manager. These persons tended to be responsible for non-teaching staff, facilities and grounds.

Management commitment

- The key to success lies in the organization's culture. What importance does top administration place on safety?
- Commitment from the superintendent, treasurer and school board is critical.
- Some school board members may be experienced business people with a solid understanding of employee safety and workers' compensation. When available, take advantage of this experience.
- All schools surveyed agree at least one key individual needs to be committed to safety and workers' compensation.
- Accountability is vital. Assign someone the responsibility for safety, provide him or her with the tools, training and authority to act, and then hold him or her accountable.
- Once commitment to safety is in place with top administration, address safety responsibilities and accountability within each facility and across all departments.
- Include employee safety measures in the performance-review process. Set safety goals, communicate expectations, establish performance measurements and hold people accountable. For example:
 1. Performance measures at the operational level (supervisors, teachers, counselors, custodians, food service employees, etc.) should focus on such activities as safety audits, safety meetings, in-service training, accident reports and safety suggestions;
 2. Performance measures at the school administration level (principal, assistant principal) tend to include tracking and measuring the safety activities at the operational level, as well as school-specific results, such as reduction in injuries, return to work and claims-management issues;
 3. Performance measures at the district administration level (superintendent, treasurer, business manager, school board) tend to include tracking and measuring school-specific results, and district-wide results, such as reduction in workers' compensation costs and impact on total budget.
- Consider developing and issuing a safety policy statement that clearly communicates top administration's commitment to employee safety and health.
- Historically, most schools have focused on student safety rather than employee safety. A comprehensive approach to safety can address both.

"To have a good safety program, it must be integrated into the culture of the organization,"

— Fred Stephens, director of business services, Lakewood City Schools

Employee involvement

All school districts interviewed by the us stress the importance of employee involvement in the employee safety process. In addition, all of the school districts use some form of a safety committee or safety team. Organization of teams and how they operate vary from school to school.

One school district includes only classified employees on its team, while another school district includes teachers on its team. Perhaps the most effective team includes certified and classified employees, union presidents from both groups, principals, supervisors and a member of the school board.

Effective teams have a well-defined purpose. They have good decision-making skills and the authority to act on their decisions. They consider meetings high priority and make all necessary accommodations to allow each member to attend. Effective teams emphasize shared decision making. They use input and feedback from the entire organization when possible. Involvement in safety activities is so important, these schools are willing to pay overtime, rearrange schedules or provide substitutes to allow employees to participate.

The activities and responsibilities of each safety committee/team vary and include any number of the following:

- Conduct regularly scheduled meetings;
- Post meeting minutes informing the entire organization of the team's activities and accomplishments;
- Conduct safety inspections and/or oversee the inspection process;
- Monitor the status of safety issues and hold people accountable for corrective action;
- Monitor the safety-suggestion program, implement suggestions and provide feedback;
- Publish a safety newsletter or contribute to the safety section of a general newsletter;
- Form safety project teams as needed;
- Constantly communicate safety issues to top administrators to keep them informed, establish accountability and ensure timely completion of action items;
- A school board member serves on the safety committee and acts as a liaison between the committee and the board;
- An executive steering committee consisting of a school board member, the superintendent, the business manager, treasurer, principals and the safety team facilitator.

"Safety starts at the top and must involve everyone in the organization,"
— Fred Stephens, director of business services, Lakewood City Schools

Communication

Extensive communication is a common theme among all school districts the we interviewed. However, there is no consistency in the way this communication takes place. Listed below are communication techniques used, some of which are outlined in the Employee involvement section on page 8.

Communication techniques include:

- Communicate the safety policy statement;
- Communicate safety responsibilities, performance measures and accountability systems;
- Post safety committee meeting minutes;
- Hold safety meetings;
- Operate a safety suggestion program and provide regular feedback and status reports;
- Sponsor labor/management forums;
- Publish safety newsletters or a safety section in a general newsletter;

- Hold monthly/quarterly employee forums with the superintendent;
- Conduct one-on-one interaction on a daily basis. Attempt to address safety issues and concerns using the quickest methods and at the lowest level possible rather than waiting for the next committee meeting or forum. Communicate safety issues addressed at the local level. Communicate to the committee or the forums so the entire organization can benefit from knowing what the safety issue was and how it was addressed;
- One school district conducted a mini safety perception survey. A comprehensive perception survey is available through the Division of Safety & Hygiene. Contact your local customer service office for details.

“Safety is a day-to-day thing. I try to take advantage of daily interactions with my employees, constantly stressing to them the importance of practicing safe work habits during their daily operations,” — Al Yano, service manager, Independence City Schools

Safety education and training

All school districts interviewed by us stress the importance of safety education and training. Safety education and training begins with the top administration. Often, however, top administration does not fully understand workplace safety issues or the workers’ compensation system. As one school administrator put it, “You first have to educate the educators.”

BWC employer services specialists are available to meet with you to discuss your workers’ compensation history, analyze your practices and recommend improvements. And Division of Safety & Hygiene safety consultants are available to meet with you to analyze safety culture and practices, and recommend improvements. In addition, there is a multitude of Division of Safety & Hygiene training courses available to help you better understand workers’ compensation and safety-management strategies.

Safety education and training for employees — principals, assistant principals, supervisors, teachers, counselors, custodians, food service employees, groundskeepers, etc. — are just as important. Here are things you can do to make your employee safety education and training effective:

- Implement an effective new employee orientation process;
- Conduct employee in-service training;
- Provide job-specific training to all employees;
- Take advantage of all training opportunities through your local education associations, third-party administrators (TPAs) or other sources;
- Use the training seminars and videotapes available through the Division of Safety & Hygiene.

Most schools conduct the bulk of their in-service training at the start of the school year. However, one district surveyed by us conducts training for classified employees in the summer months. Another district views training as so important that it appointed a training coordinator to oversee all training.

Employees may perceive in-service training provided by an outside source as more credible and, therefore, have a greater impact.

Injury reporting and treatment

First, formalize the injury reporting and treatment process. Document it in writing. Then ensure it is well communicated and understood by all employees of the school district. And make sure injured employees report all injuries, no matter how minor, to their supervisor.

Consider specifying the time frame for reporting injuries in your policy (within 24 hours). Provide the necessary contact names and phone numbers to allow for this communication.

Ensure the injured employee receives proper medical treatment. We recommend you take the following steps:

- Establish a list (network) of preferred medical providers in your area;
- Visit those providers and discuss treatment protocol and communication procedures;
- Invite providers to tour your facilities to familiarize them with your operations;
- Develop written job descriptions that include physical demands analysis and provide copies to the medical providers to assist them with return-to-work orders (see Return to work on page 9);
- Clearly identify which party (school or medical provider) will complete BWC's *First Report of an Injury, Occupational Disease or Death* (FROI) form and submit it to the managed care organization (MCO).

While your employee recovers from his or her injury, maintain close contact with the injured employee. Help him or her through the workers' compensation process. Provide the injured worker with information and answer his or her questions. Remind the injured worker of your interest to get him or her back to work as soon as possible. Hold the injured employee accountable to provide appropriate medical forms and information. And work closely with the injured employee, medical provider and the MCO to return the injured employee to work as soon as medically able.

One school district we interviewed has its safety coordinator, in addition to its TPA, attend all Industrial Commission of Ohio hearings to clarify information and answer questions related to each case.

Following an accident, immediately conduct an accident analysis (investigation). Identify the person responsible for conducting accident analyses. This person may differ from district to district. Typically, the injured employee's immediate supervisor, the safety coordinator, member(s) of the safety committee or a combination of these people, conduct accident analyses. Provide comprehensive training for all persons that will conduct accident analyses.

Ensure the accident report form includes accident causation analysis and corrective action. It is critical to learn how and why the accident occurred, and make the necessary changes to prevent recurrence of a similar accident. Also, consider having an accident-review team (can be safety committee) review all accidents for the following elements:

- Accident reports are filled out completely and in a timely fashion;
- Causal factor analysis completed with accident causes identified;
- Corrective action specified, assigned and completed;
- Coordinate communication between accident analysis process and workers' compensation process. Often these functions are managed separately and yet to be effective, they must be closely coordinated;
- Provide at least one well-equipped accident-analysis kit for each facility.

Enter all recordable injuries on the appropriate recordkeeping log. Public schools should use the Public Employment Risk Reduction Program's Form 300P. Private schools should use the Occupational Safety and Health Administration 300 Log. Analyze your injury/illness log to identify and address possible injury trends.

Note: the Division of Safety & Hygiene offers Accident Analysis training (train-the-trainer). Contact the training center for details.

Return to work/transitional work

All schools interviewed confirm the importance of an effective return-to-work process. This is perhaps the single most effective claims-management strategy available. Most schools interviewed seem to handle return to work on an informal, case-by-case basis and have no formal agreement with the union(s) or contract language on return to work. However, all schools work closely with their union(s) on all return-to-work cases.

The study also found most school districts only return an injured employee to a job within the employee's original job classification. However, a couple of school districts have negotiated return-to-work procedures into the union(s) contract(s). Some of these contractual agreements allow injured employees to return to any job that meets medical restrictions.

Benefits of transitional work include:

- The employee earns full wages, retains all benefits, earns service credits and continues as an active member of the union;
- The school gets a productive worker, can take advantage of the injured employee's experience, can use injured employees as trainers for substitutes or replacement workers, and saves workers' compensation costs.

Returning an injured worker to the job as soon as safely possible before the worker is 100-percent recovered lowers your workers' compensation costs. It's a guaranteed return on your human resources investment and your most valuable asset — your employees.

A transitional work program uses real job duties for a specified time period to gradually return the injured worker to the workers' original job. The program's components include job analyses of the employee's job tasks, labor-management collaboration, and program-policy development and program evaluation for effectiveness.

Fact: National statistics show indirect costs for a work-place injury that becomes a lost-time claim is four times greater than any direct claim expense. These costs include decreased productivity, hiring and training replacement expenses, overtime for loss of work, legal bills and loss of morale, business and customer goodwill. The costs to your injured workers are even greater.

For more information on transitional work, contact your local BWC employer services specialist. In addition, you can access transitional work information on BWC's Web site at ohiobwc.com.

Safety audits (inspections)

Most schools we contacted indicate they conduct a comprehensive safety audit of each building at least annually as part of their safety process.

If your school district doesn't conduct regular safety audits, BWC safety consultants are available to assist you with developing and implementing a safety audit process.

The primary purpose of a safety audit process is to identify and correct potential safety hazards before an injury occurs. Audits should focus on both unsafe conditions and unsafe behaviors.

The following are examples of safety audits that many schools have implemented:

- Comprehensive safety audits (all facilities, annually or quarterly);
- Custodian daily inspection check list;
- Classroom and office self-audit check list;
- Playground inspections (monthly);
- Bus driver's daily safety check list;
- School bus monthly inspection and maintenance form (bus mechanics);
- School security check list (conducted after all alarm conditions);
- Request for repair forms (work orders).

Ensure person(s) participating in an audit are thoroughly trained. Each audit process must have a review process associated with it. Review each audit report and identify action steps required to make necessary improvements. Assign responsibility for each action step, set target dates and hold people accountable for timely completion of action steps. Follow up to ensure the corrective actions were completed, they resolved the original safety issue and no new safety hazards were created.

Safety programs (compliance)

While conducting this study, it became apparent that most schools are not in compliance with House Bill 308, which created the public employer risk reduction program. One school used OSBA's Safe Steps Program to enhance its safety process and address many compliance elements. Your local department of health may provide information and assistance on some safety and health programs.

In addition, many Division of Safety & Hygiene training courses will help you. Contact the training center for more information.

Challenges

The school districts we studied clearly demonstrate they can effectively manage employee safety in schools and have experienced impressive results from their efforts. However, each of these school districts was quick to point out that managing employee safety in schools poses some significant challenges.

Time

- Finding the time to devote to safety, conduct training, hold meetings, and develop safety systems and processes seems to be the biggest barrier.
- The challenge of coordinating schedules of the various employees involved in the safety process makes holding safety meetings difficult. Most schools state teachers are the most challenging group to involve in the safety process.
- Few schools have or can justify having a full-time safety coordinator. Therefore, safety responsibilities tend to be fragmented among several staff members who may not have the time to effectively manage the safety process.
- There tends to be a public perception that most schools are top-heavy in administration. Therefore, attempts to add administration to help manage safety can be difficult to sell.

Funding

- Most schools face constant battles to maintain and justify limited budgets.
- Significant time and energy may be spent trying to convince the community to support a levy. This may reduce the time and energy available for safety activities.
- As mentioned above, the budget does not permit adding staff to manage safety. Therefore, safety responsibilities may fall to a person who has little time to devote to safety.
- Most schools struggle with limited funding for facility maintenance and repairs. It becomes increasingly difficult to maintain aging buildings.

Competing priorities

- Competing priorities and mandates pull schools in many directions.
- Constantly changing priorities can create a trend where employee safety issues are addressed only during crisis or when convenient. Schools tend to deal with the most urgent priority today and then forget about it and move on to the next. This can seriously erode employee trust and confidence in the safety process.
- Political issues and priorities do not always match with the desires and intentions of the school administration.
- Schools will do what schools get measured and rewarded for doing. Top priority seems to be proficiency testing.
- Historically, schools have concerned themselves primarily with student safety, not employee safety.

Overcoming challenges

The school districts that participated in this study have demonstrated an ability to overcome most of the challenges mentioned on the previous page. The following are recommendations to help school districts overcome the barriers to effective safety management.

- Integrate employee safety into every operation of the school. It must be priority each and every day.
- Use the many BWC services that are available to you at no additional charge. You pay for these services through your premiums.
- Educate school administrators about workers' compensation and safety management. BWC can provide personal education on-site.
- Include school board members in workers' compensation and safety discussions. School board members are often business people with a clear understanding of workers' compensation and safety issues.
- Successful schools seem to have a very strong and dedicated person responsible for safety. Identify who this individual is within your district. Ensure he or she has sufficient time to devote to the safety process.
- Employee involvement (including teachers) is critical.
- Gaining and maintaining trust is key. Employees must believe management is sincerely committed to employee safety. Management must earn employees' trust daily by demonstrating its commitment to safety through actions.
- Effectively managing employee safety results in significant reduction of operating costs. Money saved is available for use elsewhere in the budget. Examples may include:
 - Providing professional development opportunities for staff;
 - Conducting safety-related in-service training;
 - Making needed facility improvements;
 - Purchasing new equipment, curriculum or technology upgrades;
 - Prolonging the budget to postpone the need for a levy or reducing the amount of the levy requested;
 - Funding extracurricular activities.
 - The final cost justification is the cost of doing nothing. Can you afford to not manage employee safety and health?

"To not manage employee safety and health would be irresponsible. If this was your money, what would you do?"

— Betsy Franklin, coordinator of student processing services, Ashtabula Area City Schools

Final word

Implementing an effective safety and health process will reduce injuries, keep experienced employees on the job, cut costs, improve morale and ultimately enhance the schools mission of educating students.

BWC's safety services

To learn about the safety services BWC offers, visit BWC's Web site, ohiobwc.com, or call 1-800-OHIOBWC to request a *Safety Services Catalog*.

Internet sites for school employee safety and health

Health information network

www.neahin.org/

Indoor air quality

www.epa.gov/iaq/school

www.dehs.umn.edu/iaq/school

www.ehhi.org/school

School bus safety

www.nhtsa.dot.gov

School crime and violence issues

www.fbi.gov/publications/school/school2.pdf

www.schoolsafety.us

www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osdfs

www.nea.org/schoolsafety

The National Council for Educational Support Personnel

www.nea.org/esp/

Site contains safety information for bus drivers and custodial personnel.

The National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities

www.edfacilities.org

Hot topics on K-12 school planning, financing, design, construction, operations and maintenance.

Recordkeeping

www.ohiobwc.com/downloads/blankpdf/PERRRecordkeepingpackage.xls