



WISCONSIN SCHOOL SAFETY COORDINATORS ASSOCIATION
WSSCA

September 2011 Newsletter

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“*Welcome Back!*” is the message that all of us will hear as our calendars reach September. The energy of a new school year infects us all with its high hopes, readiness to learn new things and meet new friends.

WSSCA would like to “Welcome Back” our membership from their long, hot summer days, the hard work that went into their buildings and projects, and the efforts by everyone that make each upcoming school year a success. September is also a great time to take look at Safety with the same renewed interest that each new school year brings. We would like to share some of these with you.

Playground Safety: According to the National Safety Council, in 2009, more than 230,000 children visited hospital emergency rooms because of playground injuries. Many playground injuries can be prevented. Use the following points to ensure that the playgrounds in your area are ready for the children to safely run, jump, swing and slide to their hearts content.

1. ***Soft Surface.*** Because nearly 80% of playground injuries are caused by falls to the ground, improper surfacing is the first thing to watch for when inspecting your playgrounds. Wood chips, mulch, wood fibers, pea gravel, shredded rubber and rubber matting all cushion falls. Make sure the appropriate depths for whichever material is used in your playgrounds is maintained.
2. ***Swings.*** Swings are pieces of moving equipment that are most likely to cause injuries to children. Animal swings should not be used. Metal or wooden seats should be replaced with soft seats. Swings should be set far enough away from other equipment so others won't be hit by moving swings. Manufacturers of swings will have defined fall zones identified if purchasing new equipment. Full bucket seats are recommended for younger children. Half bucket seats are dangerous because babies and toddlers can slide out of them.
3. ***Smooth Sliding.*** Slides should be well anchored, have firm handrails and good traction on steps. There should be no gaps between the slide and the platform and there should be a bar at the top of the slide so that children have to sit before going down.
4. ***Safe seesaws and merry-go-rounds.*** Spring loaded seesaws are best for young children. Avoid adjustable seesaws with chains because children can crush their hands under the chains. Traditional seesaws should have an impact absorbing object under the seat to keep it from hitting the ground. Merry-go-rounds, or “whirls” or “roundabouts” are best for school age children. They should have hand grips, and the rotating platform should be level, free of sharp edges, and have adequate clearance to prevent crushing or severing of limbs.

5. *Improve your playground.* Some states require playgrounds to follow standards of the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) while some states require playgrounds to follow standards set in the Consumer Product Safety Commissions (CPSC) “*Handbook for Public Playground Safety.*” Know what is expected of you as the owner of the equipment.

Ensuring Safety and Security in our Nations Schools: WSSCA supports creating and maintaining a safe school environment as a goal shared by all schools and districts. Tragic events such as the shootings in Kentucky, Colorado, and Minnesota, the tornados in Alabama, and the Hurricanes Katrina and Rita emphasize the importance of engaging school administrators in developing and maintaining school emergency management plans to prevent-mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from all-hazards (e.g. natural disasters, school shootings, infectious diseases, etc.). Schools across the country are putting “safety on the agenda” by enhancing and strengthening school emergency management plans. The following information is provided to us by the U.S. Department of Education’s Emergency Response and Crisis Management Technical Assistance Center.

Addressing the Four Phases of Emergency Management

A comprehensive, all-hazard school emergency management plan is framed within the four phases of school emergency management: Prevention-Mitigation, Preparedness, Response, and Recovery. The four phases of emergency management guide and build the foundation for successful emergency planning. The interconnected phases are the basis for creating tailored and comprehensive district and school-based plans, in collaboration with community partners such as fire, police, public health, mental health, emergency management services, and other community agencies that have the expertise and resources to help before, during, and after an emergency. The plans should document everything required to implement and maintain the plans including but not limited to: chain of command, roles and responsibilities for staff, first responders, and relevant community partners; activities to be performed; benchmarks and timelines for accomplishing each task; resources required; and desired outcomes. These procedures must be put in writing, communicated appropriately to staff, students, families, first responders, and practiced through drills and exercises.

1. Prevention-Mitigation. It is important to assess and address the safety and integrity of the school facilities, culture, and climate to ensure a safe and healthy learning environment. Prevention is the action(s) taken to decrease the likelihood that an event or crisis will occur, and may include establishing communication procedures for staff, parents, students, and the media, and conducting comprehensive hazard assessments. Mitigation is the action(s) schools and districts take to eliminate or reduce the loss of life and property damage related to an event that cannot be prevented, and includes activities such as fencing hazardous areas, securing bookshelves to the wall, and anchoring outdoor equipment that could become a projectile.

2. Preparedness. School administrators should collaborate with local first responders, including law enforcement, fire safety, and emergency medical services in developing response procedures and protocols for evacuation, lock-down, and shelter-in-place. The lessons learned from past disasters, such as Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, illustrate the importance of establishing protocols that clearly assign roles and responsibilities to both school staff and first responders, developing Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs) with partners, and pre-negotiating contracts for critical services (such as transportation, construction, mental health) that the schools may need following an emergency event. Emergency management structures, established through an Incident Command System (ICS), should be clearly established and communicated during the

Preparedness phase. Providing training and conducting exercise and drills (such as tabletops, functional exercises and full-scale drills) enforces the plan, identifies potential weaknesses and ensures that the school community is better prepared.

3. Response. School officials and community partners should work together to implement the emergency management plan and effectively contain and resolve an emergency. The proactive efforts taken by the school community during the Prevention-Mitigation and Preparedness phases will facilitate a more effective response. Prior to an emergency, school officials should collaborate with local first responders and community partners to ensure mutual understanding of their respective roles and responsibilities during an emergency, and the physical structure of the school. Activation of the ICS team will assist with a school or district's response efforts. Finally, the response protocol, involved parties, and duration of response will vary depending on the severity and intensity of the incident.

4. Recovery. Working closely with community partners, government officials and other stakeholders, resources can be provided to assist students and staff in the healing process and to help restore the learning environment. School districts and schools must develop plans prior to a crisis or an emergency for physical/structural, emotional, business / fiscal and academic recovery. Districts should make plans for both short- and long-term recovery efforts in their schools as Recovery needs and activities will also vary based on the scope of the incident. These plans must address the diverse needs of students and staff, including those with disabilities and special needs.

Involving School Administrators in Emergency Management Activities

Involving school administrators is crucial for effective emergency management at the school and district level. Administrator buy-in is the key to communication and collaboration among the entire school community, including teachers, staff, students, parents, and community partners. To actively engage school administrators in emergency management activities, schools and districts can utilize the following strategies:

- ***Emphasize the Importance of Collaboration with Community Partners.*** District and school-based administrators must realize they can help mitigate the impacts of a crisis by planning in advance with school staff and community partners. Administrators should be reminded that they would not be faced with resolving a crisis by themselves should one occur. It is important to emphasize to both district and school-based administrators that past crises such as Columbine, 9-11, and Hurricane Katrina magnify the need to have an emergency management plan. Administrators that have experienced a school crisis or emergency can be asked to speak with other administrators to emphasize the importance of collaboration, and share their lessons learned.
- ***Help Administrators Understand the Benefits of School Emergency Management.*** Emergencies and crises unfold quickly and it is unlikely that emergency responders are located next to schools. Therefore, schools must develop the capability to be self-reliant until first responders arrive. To help both district and school administrators understand the benefits of school emergency management administrators should become familiar with the rationale and concepts of the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and the Incident Command System (ICS).
- ***Provide School-based Administrators Support to Engage in Emergency Management.*** It is important that district-based administrators support school-based administrators by providing the leadership, access to training, resources, time, and processes needed for creating well-integrated emergency management plans. These activities should address

how to design, implement, evaluate, and consistently update the plans. District administrators should raise awareness and show support through on-going dialogue, and informing principals of expectations, funding allotments, and training opportunities.

By collaborating with community partners and actively planning, training, and updating plans prior to an emergency, school administrators are better equipped to meet the safety and security needs of students, teachers, and staff. The U.S. Department of Education's Emergency Response and Crisis Management Technical Assistance Center (ERCM TA Center) offers resources for public and nonpublic schools and school districts to help strengthen and enhance emergency management plans. The ERCM TA Center has developed three emergency management publication series: ERCM *Express* Newsletters, *Lessons Learned* and *Helpful Hints* that address topics such as food safety, dealing with weapons on campus, and addressing the needs of special needs populations. The Center also provides emergency management training opportunities, as well as detailed technical assistance on a variety of emergency management issues.

Resources:

Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools (OSDFS), Emergency Planning Web site. Emergency Planning is part of the Department's "Lead and Manage My School" series, a group of Web sites designed to support administrators. OSDFS presents information and resources regarding the Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Discretionary Grant Program alongside valuable emergency management for schools resources.

Accessible at <http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/emergencyplan/index.html>

Emergency Response and Crisis Management (ERCM) Technical Assistance (TA) Center Web site. The ERCM TA Center Web site offers school-based resources addressing emergency management. Resources include a Web cast, training documents presented by experts and publications addressing key issues. Information on the R EMS - formally Emergency Response and Crisis Management - discretionary grant program is updated annually. Accessible at

<http://ercm.ed.gov>

Pat Meyers, DePere

EDITOR'S NOTES: 1. I have received several requests for information on the new Concealed Carry Law, Act 35, and its impact on schools. Next month I will address this matter with specific information. For now, understand that schools are STILL off-limits to gun bearers. NO CHANGE. NO GUNS IN SCHOOLS! 2. WSSCA is pleased to announce a FREE school security conference in the Chicago area on September 8, featuring Paul Timm. The conference is sponsored by the Illinois Terrorism Task Force, among others. Info is available at: <http://www.gbriskcontrol.com/retasecurityregistration/>. 3. Fox Valley Technical College is offering a special session on Child Abuse Investigations on September 7. See the attached flyer.

THOUGHT OF THE DAY: If it is predictable, it is preventable - and "hope" is not a strategy.

Peter Pochowski
Executive Director and Editor

Education First - Safety Always