

# SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION

School construction projects have unique challenges and concerns, from ballot initiatives and funding, to scheduling, coordination, and communication. None of these concerns are as important as the safety of all students, employees, and visitors throughout the construction process, however.

The following checklist may be helpful for schools as they prepare for upcoming construction projects.

## PLANNING FOR A SAFE PROJECT

- ✓ Ensure the contractor is qualified by reviewing their certificate of insurance, choosing someone with an experience modification factor of 1.0 or less, checking the Occupational Safety and Health Administration website for past inspection and violation data and verifying that safety training is up to date.
- ✓ Hold an initial meeting and weekly meeting with the contractor to talk about safety hazards and share information about the site.
- ✓ Have a plan for communicating with staff about what they can expect during construction. Choose a point person that is in contact with the contractor and the staff, and can handle issues that come up right away. Often the facilities director will play this role. Provide staff with a contact list so they know who they can reach out to if construction-related issues or questions come up.
- ✓ Have a plan for where the construction workers will park and enter the building, and try to keep it as separate from staff and students as possible. This helps prevent hazards such as employees tripping over construction materials. Communicate this to contractors, staff, and students.
- ✓ Have a traffic control plan with clearly identified traffic and pedestrian routes and ample barricades.
- ✓ If it's an addition, determine how the construction will be barricaded so that kids and others don't wander in and put themselves in danger.
- ✓ Have an emergency response plan.
- ✓ Ask for the contractor's plan for controlling air quality throughout the project, especially if they are cutting concrete or doing block work, which can create silica exposure, or removing asbestos or mold from the building during a remodel.
- ✓ Learn what types of personal protective equipment will be required in the construction area to keep workers and anyone else entering safe. This could include safety vests, hard hats, safety glasses, steel toe boots, respirators, and possibly fall protection equipment if working from heights.
- ✓ Plan to have adequate dumpster space so materials aren't overflowing or blowing around.
- ✓ Avoid waivers of subrogation which prevent you from holding the contractor accountable if they are responsible for one of your employees being injured. Plan for how you will control access to the school while construction workers are going in and out.



## SAFETY DURING CONSTRUCTION

- ✓ Communicate often with staff to keep them up to date with any aspects of the project that might affect them, such as noise and air quality. For example, if the workers will be coming in at 5 a.m. rather than 7 a.m. to beat the heat, let your staff know. Have Safety Data Sheets (SDSs) available for any chemicals being used onsite.
- ✓ Don't allow employees to take used construction materials and broken items home. Throw them in the construction dumpster.
- ✓ If you're asking people to use alternate routes to avoid construction, use signage to warn people early enough of the alternate path that they won't be tempted to take a shortcut through the construction area.
- ✓ Ensure the contractor has sufficient signage posted around all areas of construction to warn of the dangers entering a construction area.
- ✓ Ensure sufficient fencing and barricades are in place to prevent students and visitors from being able to wander into the construction area.
- ✓ Don't allow foot traffic below where a crane is working or there is overhead work ongoing. Ensure barricades are in place.
- ✓ Don't allow the contractor to use the school's equipment (a shop classroom to weld, etc.).

## FOLLOW SAFE MOVING PRACTICES

If employees need to move classroom equipment due to the construction:

- ✓ Encourage employees who need to use ladders to have shoulder bags or "pouches." The bags can be slung across the body to ensure they don't slide off. Staff can put items into the bags as they take them down, keeping their hands free to hold on when climbing down the ladders.
- ✓ Ensure all employees know that standing on chairs, tables, etc., is strictly forbidden. Prominently post "Don't you dare stand on a chair" posters.
- ✓ Ensure ladders, dollies, push carts, etc. are available and easily accessible for each hallway.
- ✓ Make sure employees understand they are not to move file cabinets, desks or other furniture without assistance and to plan ahead to get help.
- ✓ Limit the size of moving boxes in order to limit the weight. If possible, get boxes with handles. Provide normal size boxes for light objects and smaller boxes for books, etc. Limit the weight of any box to 35 pounds or less to prevent ergonomic injuries.

Following this checklist will help to ensure a smooth, safe construction process for everyone! •

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