

New York State School Safety Group 491

Safe Schools Agenda

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- Site Administrators
- Transportation Dir.
- Lunch Director
- Classroom Teachers
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A monthly service provided to help you with your efforts to make your school safe for students, staff and the public

Don't Shortchange Roof Inspections

Many of our school buildings were built in the 1950's and 60's, and their roofs are starting to show their age, especially if they have not been kept in tip-top shape. Leaking roofs can lead to mold infestations and structural collapse.

Mold infestations affect the health of staff and students, and lead to costly shutdowns of school operations and expensive repairs. The district will bear the full cost of a mold remediation project when it proves to have been caused by inadequate maintenance. The solution is frequent inspections by qualified experts and prompt repairs and/or replacement.

A leaking roof can also lead to structural collapse, as occurred at Taft Elementary School in the Washingtonville CSD in 2004. A section of roof collapsed into an empty classroom. Everything came down - the bar joists, roof decking, membrane roofing and the plaster ceiling. A structural engineer found that the structural steel bar joists collapsed due to long-term water exposure. The plaster ceiling had shown no indication of a moisture problem because the bar joist holding the roof up was constructed in a way that allowed water to sit on top of it. When the bar joists rusted through, the roof collapsed.

If the room had been occupied, there could have been serious injuries.

Make sure to schedule a thorough inspection of all roofs in the district by a qualified design professional, and take appropriate follow-up

actions. Also, instruct the inspector to assess the structural integrity of building exterior walls. Cracks in those walls can also lead to mold infestation and structural collapse.

Tips for Parents on Their Teenage Drivers

In your next district newsletter, advise parents to check out the September 4 issue of AutoWeek magazine. It contains a revealing article on the perils of teenage driving; the need to slow down access to drivers' licenses; and numerous resources available to parents to help them prepare their children for the responsibilities of driving.

***AutoWeek offers this perspective:
Approximately 2,600 lives have been lost in the
war in Iraq since March of 2003; in that same
period, more than 22,000 teens aged 15-19 have
died on U.S. roads.***

To put it another way, 5,500 teens die in car crashes each year...and 300,000 are injured! Clearly, we are failing our children. There is a growing consensus that skill training alone is not doing the job. We have to grow young drivers with the right attitudes and maturity.

Forty-four states and the District of Columbia have Graduated Licensing Laws which restrict driving based on age, driving experience, curfews and other limitations. Check out www.nhtsa.gov to see how your state rates. According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, graduated licensing works, with teen fatality rates falling by 20 to 25 percent after a state's enactment of GDL.

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Some expert's say, however, that none of the GDL laws are optimal, and even if they were, they will fail unless parents step up to the plate. Parents need to take control of the whole process of driver training, and take their time. They can find resources for teaching their teens about driving and numerous websites in the AutoWeek article, "Back to School: Teenage Driving".

Dangerous Distractions

According to the National Highway Safety Administration, 25 percent of the 6.3 million vehicle crashes each year involve some type of driver distraction.

It's important that school bus drivers are aware of the dangers posed by distracted drivers encountered on the road - and it is important that they realize that they too can be distracted from their very important responsibilities by their own actions.

The problem is multitasking - performing a number of other activities while behind the wheel. We have all seen women applying makeup, men shaving, even reading while driving down the road. Then there are the eaters, and the cell phone users.

A National Transportation Safety Administration study found that dialing a cell phone triples the risk of a crash or near crash, and talking or listening on a cell phone increases that risk by 130 percent.

"Drive defensively" takes on new meaning -

- Watch out for those distracted drivers and make sure that you are free of distractions.
- Keep objects off of the dashboard that could fall off during vehicle operation.
- Don't hang clothing or other items within the bus.
- Keep front and side windows and mirrors clear of obstructions at all times.

- Don't eat or drink while in motion, or even at a stop.
- Don't use your cell phone while driving.
- Pull the bus off the road before handling any problems with students.

From the Courts...

An Illinois woman is suing her parents for negligence, claiming that they failed to make repairs on a gutter that discharged water that froze on their driveway. She slipped on the driveway, breaking her left ankle and injuring her foot and leg.

A Suffolk County, New York woman has pleaded guilty to unlawfully cashing workers' compensation checks payable to her deceased mother. The New York State Insurance Fund (NYSIF) Division of Confidential Investigations uncovered the fraud.

Time to Green Clean

Effective September 1, State Education Law and State Finance Law require school districts to reduce exposure of staff and students to potentially harmful chemicals and substances used in the cleaning and maintenance of schools by using guidelines to purchase environmentally friendly cleaning products.

The Office of General Services has now developed guidelines and a list of approved cleaning products. See www.emsc.nysed.gov/facplan/greenclean.htm.

