

Professional Underwriters

Safe Schools Agenda

Route to:

- Superintendent
- School Business Off.
- Athletic Director
- Supt. Bldgs/Grounds
- 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

School Security Must Not Compromise Fire Safety

The yearly national fire loss for fires on school properties is estimated at \$85 million in 2003 to 2005. The dollar losses are the result of an estimated 14,700 fires that required a fire department response: 36% were trash fires, 19% were fires in open fields, and 43% were structural fires.

Sometimes, the needs of school security seem to conflict with the requirements of fire safety. For example, exits may be restricted for security reasons, preventing escape should a fire occur. The best way to keep this from happening is to ask a fire safety expert to assist you in the design of your security procedures. This is especially important because people do get injured in school fires, and at slightly higher rates than in home fires.

The causes for fires in elementary schools mostly involve cooking (27%), incendiary or suspicious activity (25%), and heating (12%). The primary cause of fires in middle, junior or high schools is due to incendiary or suspicious activity (47%), followed by cooking (15%), and heating (7%). The highest percentage of fires occurs in middle and high schools.

Juvenile fire setters generally fall into three categories: 1) experimentation, 2) reactionary, and 3) delinquent. The first group involves elementary children who experiment out of curiosity and lack of supervision. They are five times more likely to do it again unless professional intervention takes place. Youth who do not have adequate problem-solving skills or cannot express their feelings use fire to convey these feelings. This group also lacks supervision and has easy access to sources of ignition. The third group, the delinquents, is typically older. They set fires that are usually peer driven and do not understand the legal repercussions associated with setting fires.

A partnership among teachers, administrators, fire service, and the judicial system needs to identify fire setters early in their career. There is good research on this. See <http://www.sosfires.com/>.

Suicide Tied to Work Injury Compensable in 2 States

Case One:

The Appeals Court of MA has awarded Workers' Compensation (WC) death benefits to the widow of a 50-year old mechanic who killed himself after being terminated.

The court, in the case of Gilbert Dube, found that the widow was entitled to benefits because her husband's suicide was *causally connected to a work-related back injury and pain that led to a deteriorating mental condition*.

The insurer argued that the termination was independent and *broke a causation chain between the employee's back injury and his suicide*. The appeals court disagreed and found that *suicide is compensable when it is causally related to a work-place injury despite intervening circumstances*.

Case Two:

In a similar case in NV, a challenge was brought to a state law prohibiting family members from collecting WC benefits if a worker's death resulted from a "willful intention to injure himself."

The court ruled that the law does not apply when a "sufficient chain of causation is established."

The case arose because of a back injury sustained by a bartender when he slipped on a flight of stairs, causing injury to his spine. Surgery and medication failed to eliminate his pain. A doctor diagnosed him as psychologically destabilized and recommended he claim permanent disability status. When he killed himself, a second doctor gave the opinion that he did so because of unrelenting pain. The court disagreed with the insurer that the doctor's opinion lacked a medical rationale linking the suicide to his industrial injury.



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Email: marketing@professionalunderwriters.com
Program Administrator: Professional Underwriters, 1-800-833-8822



Planning for an Effective Safety Committee, Part III

Training of Safety Committee Representatives

- ✓ Representatives must understand the purpose of the safety committee.
- ✓ They must understand how to apply the safety committee rules.
- ✓ They must know how to conduct safety committee meetings.
- ✓ They must be trained in hazard identification and accident investigation.
- ✓ They should know whom to contact for information or help on workplace safety and health matters.
- ✓ They must attend regular safety committee meetings.
- ✓ They must participate in committee activities.
- ✓ They must understand the ground rules for committee meetings:
 - Keep the discussion focused on agenda topics.
 - Listen to others and let them finish before responding.
 - Cooperate to achieve effective solutions.
 - Finish the meeting on time.
- ✓ They should review the written agenda before the meeting so that they will be familiar with the topics to be discussed.
- ✓ After the meeting, read the minutes and note any responsibilities you have for following up.

Planning for Regular Safety Committee Meetings

- ✓ **Each representative must participate.** Make sure they understand that they will be committing to attending monthly meetings and to participating in committee activities.

- ✓ **Set a regular time, date, and place for meetings, at least once a month.**
- ✓ **Establish ground rules.**
 - Keep the discussion focused on agenda topics
 - Listen to others and let them finish before responding.
 - Cooperate to achieve effective solutions.
 - Finish the meeting on time.
- ✓ **Follow a written agenda.** Send copies of the agenda to committee members a few days before the meeting so they can review it.
- ✓ **Take accurate minutes.** Meeting minutes should include the following:
 - A brief summary of the discussion of each topic
 - A copy of committee reports, evaluations, and recommendations.
 - A copy of management's response to committee recommendations.
- ✓ Send a copy of the minutes to each member promptly after the meeting.
- ✓ Post a copy in each location where other employees can see it.
- ✓ Keep a copy of each meeting's minutes on file for three years.
- ✓ **Start the meeting on time.**
 - Distribute the agenda and handouts.
 - Review the ground rules.
 - Make introductions.
 - Review the minutes of the last meeting.
 - Review the agenda topics.

Just a Reminder; Safe Schools Agenda is going **Green** with the January edition. To be sure you receive a copy, please fax your email address to Lynn **Green** at 610.458.1050 or email her at lgreen@professionalunderwriters.com.