

SAFE SCHOOLS: A HEALTH AND SAFETY CHECK

A MANUAL OF CHECKLISTS COVERING ENVIRONMENTAL, HEALTH AND SAFETY REGULATIONS FOR SECONDARY OCCUPATIONAL AND CAREER ORIENTATION PROGRAMS IN NEW JERSEY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

INTRODUCTION

You are an administrator, safety and health coordinator, or a teacher at a secondary school with vocational-technical education programs. You know your school needs to comply with environmental, health and safety regulations, but the task seems overwhelming. You may not have much experience with occupational safety and health concerns, but your busy schedule doesn't give you many opportunities to learn more. It feels like every time you turn around, a new regulation has been issued. Who has time to get a copy of it, let alone read it! When you finally do get a chance to read a regulation, you find you have lots of questions, but who do you contact for answers? Your school's last compliance inspection could have gone better, but you're not sure what you can do to make future visits go more smoothly. On top of everything else, the New Jersey Administrative Code (N.J.A.C.) 6A:19-6.5 "Safety and Health Plan" requires that your school perform a safety and health hazard analysis for every vocational-technical education course or program in operation. What do you do?

Use the Safe Schools: A Health and Safety Check, A Manual of Checklists Covering Environmental, Health and Safety Regulations for Secondary Occupational and Career Orientation Programs in New Jersey Public Schools. This manual was designed by New Jersey vocational-technical educators for New Jersey vocational-technical educators. It will make your job easier by helping you:

- Find out which federal and state agencies regulate environmental, safety and health in vocational-technical education programs;
- Identify specific regulations that apply to New Jersey public secondary school vocational-technical classrooms, shops, and labs (only the regulations that pertain to settings on school grounds are addressed);
- Set up a checklist program that will assist teachers in doing a safety and health hazard analysis for each classroom, shop, and lab (each checklist is designed to correspond to specific environmental, safety, and health regulations so you will also be able to determine whether or not you are in compliance);
- Prepare for and participate in compliance inspections;

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- Help students learn about regulations pertinent to particular classrooms, shops, and labs, processes, and activities and the benefits of using checklists to determine compliance;
- Detect areas that need improvement in the school's total environmental, safety and health program; and
- Find sources for more information about regulations, technical assistance, and educational materials;

OVERVIEW OF THE SAFE SCHOOLS MANUAL

At a first glance, the size of the Safe Schools Manual can seem a bit overwhelming. That is because of the large number of checklists that had to be developed to cover all of the regulations applicable to vocational-technical school settings! However, you'll find that the format of the manual will make it surprisingly easy to use. There are four chapters and several supporting appendices. Each chapter builds on the preceding one to help you develop a workable plan for implementing a checklist program.

Chapter 1 - Making Sense Out of Regulations, gives background information concerning the regulatory agencies and regulations that are applicable to vocational-technical education. **Chapter 2 - How to Establish an Effective Environmental, Safety, and Health Program** outlines ways for school personnel to ensure that an effective program is instituted and maintained. **Chapter 3 - Implementing a Checklist Program** describes how to implement a checklist program to identify hazards and determine regulatory compliance. Special indexes listing the checklists by name, vocational-technical program and hazard will help you select which checklists to use for each vocational-technical course or program. This chapter also provides a case study of a real school's checklist program. Handouts are included for teacher training in the use of the checklists. **Chapter 4 - Checklists** contains the checklists.

Appendices are provided as references for additional information or help. **Appendix A: Resources** gives descriptions and contact information for regulatory agencies, professional organizations, and other occupational safety and health groups. **Appendix B: Using Safe Schools to Teach Students About Occupational Safety and Health** suggests ways to use the checklists with students and discusses other educational resources. **Appendix C: Tips for Making an Inspection a Cooperative Rather Than an Adversarial Experience** offers strategies for preparing for inspections from regulatory agencies. **Appendix D: Emergency Procedures in Public Secondary Schools in the Event of a Chemical Spill** describes

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planning regulations pertaining to emergency response. **Appendix E: Text of Selected Regulations** contains some of the regulations that apply to vocational-technical programs, including N.J.A.C. 6A:19-6 (Safety and Health Standards).

COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Below are some of the most commonly asked questions that participants raised during the development of the Safe Schools Manual:

How did the Safe Schools Manual come about?

The New Jersey Department of Education/Office of Vocational-Technical and Career Education Programs conducted a survey among vocational-technical administrators, educators, and state personnel about their health and safety needs. They heard over and over again that schools were having trouble keeping up with regulatory compliance and that they lacked tools, information, and technical assistance to carry out their responsibilities. Thus the Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences Institute (EOHSI) developed the Safe Schools Manual in direct response to the needs expressed in the survey, through a grant from the New Jersey Department of Education. A special task force was formed to give guidance to the project and the manual was field tested in several New Jersey schools to ensure the best possible product.

Are the checklists mandatory? Why should my school use them?

The completion of the checklists in and of themselves is not mandatory but they are recommended as one tool that can greatly increase your school's ability to maintain a classroom that is safe for teachers and students. It is mandatory to have a safety and health program in place, to conduct a hazard analysis for each vocational-technical course or program, to do periodic inspections and maintenance, and to comply with safety and health regulations. The checklists can assist in carrying out these mandates.

Are the checklists all I need for a safety and health program at my school?

Self-inspection checklists should be considered only one of many elements that need to be in place to protect people and the environment. Other essential elements include: management commitment, employee and student training and involvement, student safety and health competency testing, established procedures to follow in an emergency, and a coordinated effort to eliminate any hazards that are found. Many of these topics are discussed in **Chapter 2 - How to Establish an Effective Environmental, Safety and Health Program**. Suggestions for involving students are covered in **Appendix B: Using Safe Schools to Teach Students About Occupational Safety and Health**.

Do the checklists cover all of the hazards in my program?

The checklists were developed only for hazards covered by current State and federal regulations. It was beyond the scope of this project to include checklists for unregulated environmental, safety and health hazards. A vocational-technical program or course may still contain hazards, even if all of the checklists indicate good compliance. For example, as of this writing, there are no regulations pertaining to the use of video display terminals. However, VDT operators can suffer a number of ergonomics-related problems if safe practices are not followed. In **Appendix A: Resources**, an effort was made to locate resources for additional information on some of the hazards not covered by regulations.

Do the checklists deal with environmental, safety and health regulations applicable to the whole school?

The checklists only address environmental, safety and health regulations that are **directly related to vocational-technical classroom programs and courses**. For example, the Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act of 1986 (AHERA) regulations issued by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) covering management of asbestos-containing materials in schools are not addressed in this manual (although checklists and regulations pertaining to asbestos in brake linings are covered). These regulations are certainly relevant to schools in general, but are not directly related to vocational-technical education programs and courses. On the other hand, the hazardous waste disposal and electrical checklists and others can be used in other programs and classrooms.

Do the checklists cover cooperative education off school grounds?

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The checklists are designed to cover environmental, safety and health regulations that are applicable to **public vocational-technical education classroom settings on school grounds**. Some of the regulations in the checklists do not apply to non-school, non-classroom situations and locations because they are private workplaces and therefore not within the jurisdiction of the regulations for public schools. However, an understanding of the regulations covered in the Safe Schools Manual will certainly acquaint cooperative education instructors and students with the types of issues they should be concerned about in the private workplace.

Do the checklists cover science classes and adult vocational-technical education classes?

Although important safety and health regulations need to be considered in adult vocational-technical education classes and science classes, the Safe Schools Manual was not developed with these types of classes in mind. Many of the checklists, however, still apply.

If I don't identify any problems when I use the checklists to evaluate my classroom, will I be in compliance with all federal, state, and municipal regulations?

Municipal regulations were not included because they will be different for each community. An effort was made to make the checklists as comprehensive as possible, without being excessively long and cumbersome. As a result, the fine details of some regulations have been generalized or consolidated. In addition, constant changes in regulations, legitimate differences in interpretation, court decisions, and unanticipated circumstances prevent any self-inspection checklists from guaranteeing compliance with all federal and State regulations.

AN ONGOING PROCESS

Helping your school maintain regulatory compliance is a big job, even if you rely heavily on the Safe Schools Manual. Periodically the New Jersey Department of Education/Office of Vocational-Technical and Career Education Programs will hold workshops to help you get your school's checklist program off the ground.

To ensure that Safe Schools continues to meet the needs of New Jersey vocational-technical educators, we invite and encourage you to call or write to us with your suggestions, comments and questions. Contact the Safe Schools Program, University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, School of Public Health, Center for School and Community Health

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Education, 335 George Street, Liberty Plaza, Suite 2200, New Brunswick, NJ, 08903, phone: (732) 235-4988; fax: (732) 235-4960; csche-sph@umdnj.edu.