



Welcome

Dear Colleagues

Welcome to the final edition of Safety Net for 2006. As we approach the end of the year it is pleasing to reflect on those key activities which have progressed our health and safety journey.

Close observers will have seen the creation of Senior Health and Safety Consultant positions in every region, the establishment of the Corporate Workplace Health and Safety Standing Committee to address state-wide health and safety issues and the completion of an external health and safety management systems audit by DuPont (Australia).

The culmination of this very successful year was the Organisational Health Conference in late October, playing host to organisational health staff from across to state. These staff were given the opportunity to network with their colleagues and discuss state-wide health, safety and wellbeing strategies which will ultimately support regional executive directors, school leaders and school staff.

2007 will continue to be a busy year with the release of a number of key initiatives that will drive the creation of safe and healthy working and learning environments. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your support during 2006 and to wish you a wonderful and safe Christmas with your family and friends. I look forward to continued successes in the areas of health, safety and wellbeing in 2007.

Gary Barnes

**Assistant Director-General
Strategic Human Resources**

NEW SENIOR HEALTH AND SAFETY CONSULTANTS JOIN THE ORGANISATIONAL HEALTH TEAM

Congratulations and welcome to Brett Moore, David Smith and Pauline Armstrong who have recently been appointed as Senior Health and Safety Consultants in three Education Queensland regions.

Brett Moore is the Senior Health and Safety Consultant for Far North Region. Brett will be familiar to many people in Far North Queensland and his return to the health and safety role is very welcome.

David Smith will provide health and safety consultant services for Sunshine Coast Region. David comes to the department from Main Roads and brings a great deal of experience to this new role.

Pauline Armstrong has been appointed to South Coast Region. Pauline's previous employment was with Workplace Health and Safety Queensland making her a very valuable asset to the department.

Please make Brett, David and Pauline welcome as they adjust to their new roles within the department.

A complete listing of Regional Senior Health and Safety Consultants and their work areas will be provided in the next issue of Safety Net.



Don't let these slip through the Net

SCHOOL BASED EMPLOYEES WORKING DURING SCHOOL HOLIDAYS

It is a common practice during school holidays for employees, particularly teachers, to undertake work at a school in preparation for the coming term. It is important to be aware that even though this work is undertaken during the school holidays, the Department still has a duty of care to ensure the safety of these employees. In addition, should an employee be injured while performing work related activities at the school during school holidays, they are still entitled to lodge a WorkCover claim.

As the officer in charge of a school, it is the Principal's responsibility to ensure the health and safety of all employees while they are undertaking work related activities. To ensure the health and safety of employees undertaking work related activities during the school holidays Principals are to undertake the following actions:

1. Ensure you are aware of all work related activities that are going to occur during the school holidays, including all employees involved and when the activities will occur. You may wish to discuss this at the last staff meeting before the holidays and include this in a staff newsletter (if your school has one).
2. Identify if any of the activities that staff members are planning to undertake during the school holidays may present a health and safety risk (e.g. moving furniture between classrooms).
3. Organising for a risk assessment to be undertaken will help with planning the activity, prioritising risks and deciding on ways to manage any issues. Your Workplace Health & Safety Officer will be able to assist with this.
4. Review the risk assessment, and/or plan, to ensure the activity will not place the employee at risk of injury. If satisfied, approve that the activity is able to proceed as planned.
5. If an incident does occur during the school holidays, ensure that a Workplace Health & Safety Incident Report Form is completed and entered on SMS.

WATERWAYS IN SCHOOL GROUNDS

Some schools have natural waterways within the school grounds and while many of these are dry for most of the year, some are subject to flash flooding owing to the surrounding terrain and catchment area. This can be a significant hazard particularly if flooding of the waterway limits access to or egress from the school.

To manage health and safety in school design and planning, the *Design Requirements for Education Queensland Schools and Facilities* have been developed by the department's Strategic Asset Maintenance Unit. These design guidelines are to be followed by project teams in the planning, development and construction phases of all school facilities. The most recent version (September 2006) can be found on the departmental web site:

<http://iwww.qed.qld.gov.au/facilities/strategic/dg-contents.html>

Pre-existing health and safety issues in schools require that principals:

- Consult with their school Health and Safety Committee, their Facilities Account Manager and the Regional Senior Health and Safety Consultant to develop risk management and control strategies for facilities related hazards.
- Implement the control strategies in the school setting. Identified hazards should be included in the school Annual Assessment and the control strategies should be documented in the Annual Assessment Action Plan.
- Manage visitors to the school to ensure they are made aware of hazards and risks that are particular to the area of the school they are using.



Casting the Net

PREVENTING VOICE STRAIN

In order to avoid long-term voice problems it is necessary to think about how you use your voice each day and try to determine if you are using it in the most efficient and effective ways possible.

It is not only **how** your voice is used that can cause voice problems, you also need to be aware of the effects of fatigue, stress and illness on your voice, as well as any contributing acoustic risk factors.

The Rehabilitation Team within the Organisational Health Unit have developed a fact sheet to provide teachers with practical strategies for minimising voice strain.

<http://education.qld.gov.au/health/docs/voice-strain.doc>

Staff who have been diagnosed with voice strain may be able to borrow a voice amplifier through the Organisational Health Unit (contact 32354030).

INFLUENZA VACCINATION IN 2007

A preferred supplier has been determined for the delivery of influenza vaccination in 2007.

Schools and other departmental workplaces will be able to take advantage of the preferred supplier arrangement and participate in next year's program on a voluntary basis.

Your school/workplace may receive information directly from the preferred supplier, Home Therapeutics, in the coming months.

ASTHMA

Schools are reminded of their responsibilities toward the management and treatment of student health conditions such as asthma. These responsibilities are outlined in the department's Education Policy and Procedures Register (EPPR) - HLS-PR-009 Administration of Routine and Emergency Medication and Management of Health Conditions.

It includes information on the emergency treatment for asthma, anaphylaxis, epilepsy, and diabetes. In an emergency situation, school personnel may be required to administer medication to preserve the life, safety and health of a student. Schools should have an asthma reliever puffer in their first aid kits for emergency situations. Parents and caregivers of students who have been prescribed an asthma relieving medication must notify the school in writing of the circumstances surrounding its use.

DANGER - CHEMICALS IN DRINK BOTTLES

Accidental chemical ingestion has occurred when improper containers such as water bottles are used to store common chemicals such as cleaning fluids, thinners and other mixtures.

Staff and students are at risk of accidentally drinking chemicals if they are stored in this manner. First aid and medical treatment for poisoning can also be hampered if the substance is not labelled.

When dealing with chemicals it is important to keep them in the original container. If it is necessary to transfer (or decant) to a different or smaller container be sure to attach the original label to the new container or label with the exact substance, trade name, concentration and any special directions regarding its use. Never use food containers to store chemicals.

CONSTRUCTION BLUE CARD (GENERAL INDUCTION TRAINING) UPDATE

Thank you to all of the schools and Schools Officers who responded to the survey of training needs for General Induction Training (Construction Blue Card). The Organisational Health Unit received a great response and are currently organising trainers and a training calendar. It is expected that the majority of training will occur in the first six months of 2007.

To make the most of this school specific professional development, additional training modules have been created to meet the needs of departmental Schools Officers. Some of these modules will be presented by Regional Senior Health and Safety Consultants and members of the Central Office Health and Safety Team.

Your school will be contacted when the training calendar is finalised. For more information on the Construction Industry Blue Card refer to the departmental fact sheet: <http://education.qld.gov.au/health/pdfs/healthsafety/construct-blue-card.pdf>



SCHOOLS OFFICERS - MAINTENANCE OF FOOTPATHS AND SET DOWN AREAS

There has been ongoing concern regarding the responsibility for maintenance of footpaths and set down areas that are not part of the school premises. Some confusion existed as to whether schools officers should be maintaining council property.

Recommendations from the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission were:

- The council provided service should continue.
- The school should communicate with their council and elected councillor regarding the importance of safe and proper maintenance of the area.
- The schools officer should liaise with council as required.
- The schools officer should monitor such areas and on an as needs basis, attend to any matter which might impact adversely on the safety of the school community. This would include the removal of hazardous objects and dealing with long grass which might conceal a hazard.
- Further, the commissioner commented that maintenance actioned for aesthetic purposes may also be reasonable.

Therefore, where set down areas and front footpaths require maintenance, including removal of debris, mowing etc between council services, it is reasonable for schools officers to maintain such areas for both safety and aesthetic reasons.

STAFF SPORTING INJURIES ON THE INCREASE

School staff participate in many types of sporting activities including those associated with the curriculum as well as extra-curricular sporting events during lunch breaks and after school.

Whilst physical activity is always encouraged for the wellness of staff and to enhance rapport building with students, it has been noted that the number of sprain and strain injuries resulting in WorkCover claims and absenteeism is increasing amongst our school staff.

Fit and active teachers who are willing to participate in sporting activities are excellent role models for students. However, next time you plan to join in for a game of "touch" football, netball or basketball don't forget to consider an assessment of the risks.

Questions to ask include:

- Am I wearing the appropriate clothing and footwear?
- Am I physically able to take part in the activity?
- Do I have any pre-existing injuries that might be aggravated by the activity?
- Do I have time to warm up appropriately?

COMMUNICABLE DISEASES IN YOUR SCHOOL?

Schools often discover that a student or a staff member has been diagnosed with an illness such as gastroenteritis or tonsillitis and will be unable to attend school. In some circumstances, however, the disease is more serious and will require a managed response from the school e.g. bacterial meningitis, tuberculosis and whooping cough.

The school is required to take action to minimise the risk of exposure to the rest of the school community and provide information if necessary.

If a Principal or the school administration is aware that a student or a member of staff has been diagnosed with a contagious condition such as bacterial meningitis the following actions are recommended.

- Determine the exposure to the school community (i.e. were they in contact with staff and students whilst they were contagious?).
- Seek as much information as possible from the person or their parent/caregiver (you may even ask if you can speak with their doctor).
- If there are community health implications, contact a doctor from your local Queensland Health Public Health/Population Health Unit.
http://www.health.qld.gov.au/phs/org_chart.asp
- The Public Health Doctor will be able to provide you with an up to date fact sheet on the condition and provide advice to the school regarding communication with the school community.
- Advise your Executive Director of Schools (EDS), particularly if communication with the school community is required.
- The EDS will advise the Regional Executive Director as well as the Office of Education Queensland.
- The EDS, RED and Office of Education Queensland will be able to support a school in this situation in a number of ways, from assisting with approved sample letters through to liaison with the media if required.
- Your Regional Health and Safety Consultant or the Central Office Health and Safety Team can also assist the school to manage contagious conditions as well as infection control strategies.

Recent examples of conditions that have required the above response include: Scarlet Fever, Viral Meningitis, Bacterial Meningitis, Whooping Cough (Pertussis) and Chicken Pox (Varicella).

To prevent the spread of communicable diseases, it is essential that schools have excellent infection control practices in place and that vaccination is encouraged.