

Risk Manager

Answers, resources and information to help assess and reduce risk

Functioning with Building Renovation Projects By Kyle B. Stewart

As the school year winds to an end, many school district building renovation projects will commence into full speed following the last day that students occupy the building(s). Managing a large scale building renovation project is no small feat itself, especially when construction activities must be scheduled around unavoidable conflicts that exist when a building continues to be occupied to some extent. Regardless of the countless hours owner representatives and project managers spend planning for a renovation project, logistical hazards inevitably arise during every school renovation project. The key to a successful building renovation project begins with "Communication" amongst all involved parties including; but not limited to, the building administration, project manager, architect/engineer, contractors, district superintendent and the school directors. It is also vital that the line of communication paths be put in order prior to the start of the project to assist in conveying essential project information to the staff, students, community and contractors about the progress, effects on the educational process and changes that may affect operations/access to the facility or grounds during renovation activities.

The following criteria are just some of the aspects that should be evaluated, risk controls implemented and discussed amongst all applicable parties prior to embarking in a building renovation project:

Scheduling

If renovation activities must begin prior to the students last day of school and/or will not be

completed prior to the start of school; coordination of renovation activities should be scheduled as to place the least amount of impact on students and staff. If feasible, task(s) that produce nuisance dust, odors or noise should be scheduled when school is not in session (i.e., summer months, weekends, evenings, school breaks, etc.). In addition, classroom relocation(s) and/or the utilization of temporary instructional areas should be considered during the scheduling phase taking into account logistical issues that may arise.

Environmental/Safety Hazard(s) and Control(s)

As part of building renovations, normal traffic and/or pedestrian patterns may be required to be altered. Designated exterior vehicular and pedestrian traffic patterns should be clearly marked and communicated to avoid confusion and/or conflicts. Intermittent interior arrangements may be necessary to be utilized for corridors, stairs and/or exit doors based on the scope of the renovation activity. Additionally, the school district and contractors should discuss and agree on risk controls prior to the start of renovation activities and the associated potential health and safety hazards (i.e., odors, noise, dust and other contaminants, fires, and ventilation controls). The district should also evaluate their internal emergency action plan and modify egress routes when primary or secondary egress routes and/or assembly points are obstructed as part of the building renovations. Most importantly, the district should communicate modifications to all applicable staff and students and incorporate the modified egress routes into periodic

emergency action drills (i.e., fire drills).

Site Control

Access to area(s) subjected to renovation activities and/or building materials staging/storage locations should be restricted to prohibit access to unauthorized personnel. Therefore, hallways and access points should be blocked off to prevent school district staff, students and/or visitors out of areas where renovation activities have commenced or are actively taking place until the contractor(s) have officially turned the area(s) over to the school district to resume occupancy. Students may naturally be fascinated with the construction process or equipment being utilized; therefore, if applicable, construction barriers should be utilized as a deterrent. Additionally, students should be instructed to not initiate conversations with contractors or enter areas where renovation activities are occurring. Lastly, the school district should designate a staff member to ensure that access doors/points are locked preventing contractors access to unauthorized areas (i.e., student occupied areas within the building when school is in session).

For additional information or training on best practices and safety management within your school entity, please contact Director of Risk Management Sharon Orr at (866) 401-6600, ext. 7152 or sorr@cmregent.com.