

## Why School Environment is Important

### Why is the school environment important?

The physical environment of school buildings and school grounds is a key factor in the overall health and safety of students, staff, and visitors. School buildings and grounds must be designed and maintained to be free of health and safety hazards, and to promote learning. Studies have shown that student achievement can be affected either positively or negatively by the school environment. Policies and protocols must be in place to ensure food protection, sanitation, safe water supply, healthy air quality, good lighting, safe playgrounds, violence prevention, and emergency response, among other issues that relate to the physical environment of schools.

### What are the New Hampshire state requirements for physical environment of schools?

The State Fire Code under RSA 153:5 and the State Building Code under RSA 155 establish the basic requirements for the construction, operation, and maintenance of school buildings. A number of state agencies including the Department of Education, Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Environmental Services, Department of Safety, Department of Labor, and others enforce numerous statutes and administrative rules that address topics such as:

- Alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs
- Food service
- Hazardous materials such as asbestos, lead, mercury, radon, etc.
- Laboratories and shops
- Pesticides
- Playgrounds
- Safe drinking water
- Sanitation and housekeeping
- School emergency response plans
- Standards for school buildings
- Traffic safety
- Weapons

### What are the federal requirements for the physical environment of schools?

There are primarily two federal laws pertaining to the physical environment of schools:

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) enforced by the U.S. Department of Justice  
The Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act (AHERA) enforced by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

There are other federal environmental and public health laws that apply to schools. For the most part these have state equivalents that are administered by the appropriate state agencies.

One thing to be noted is that public schools in New Hampshire are not subject to the jurisdiction of the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). Workplace safety for public employees is administered by the NH Department of Labor.

### **What are some of the best practices for schools about the physical environment?**

1. Every school should have a health and safety committee comprised of

- administrators
- classroom teachers
- parents
- maintenance personnel
- school nurse
- industrial arts, studio art, and family and consumer science teachers
- laboratory science teachers
- food service personnel
- school resource officer

The committee should develop and ensure the implementation of plans for safe, healthy and well-maintained school buildings and grounds. The committee should be empowered to deal with on-going maintenance and repair issues, as well as on-going and emerging health or safety issues related to the physical environment of schools and school grounds.

2. Every school should practice emergency response drills for a variety of likely hazards and situations.

3. Schools should implement programs to maintain good indoor air quality such as the EPA's Tools for Schools program.

4. School maintenance staff should practice Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and cleaning for health also known as green cleaning.

5. Schools should use automated systems such as Healthy SEAT and/or a Computerized Maintenance Management System (CMMS) to record and analyze maintenance issues and trends. This may be done at the district level.

6. Schools should establish procedures for managing chemicals used in science classes to include storage, reordering, and disposal.

### **What resources or tools for schools are available on the physical environment?**

[Americans with Disabilities Act](#)

[National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities](#)

[New England Asthma Regional Council](#)

[U.S. Environmental Protection Agency](#)

## **Maintenance**

[Cleaning Management Institute](#)  
[National Center for Educational Statistics](#)

## **Green Cleaning**

[INFORM, Inc.](#)

## **Indoor Air Quality**

[Indoor Air Quality Design for Schools](#), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
[IAQs for Schools Tools Program](#), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
[Maine Indoor Air Quality Council](#)  
[IAQ Building Education and Assessment Model \(I-BEAM\)](#), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
[Indoor Air Quality Scientific Findings Resource Bank](#)

## **Playgrounds**

[National Program for Playground Safety](#)  
[U.S. Consumer Safety Commission](#)

## **Mold**

[Mold and Moisture](#), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
[Fungi in Indoor Environments](#), NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene  
[Center for School Mold Help](#)  
[Responsible Solutions to Mold Coalition](#)

## **Food Service**

[Competencies, Knowledge, and Skills of Effective School Nutrition Managers](#) , University of Mississippi Environmental Issues  
[Construction Industry Compliance Assistance Center](#)  
[Hazardous Waste Compliance Section](#), NH Department of Environmental Services

## **Environmentally Preferable Purchasing**

["Greening Your Purchase of Carpet: A Guide For Federal Purchasers"](#)  
["Greening Your Meetings and Conferences: A Guide For Federal Purchasers"](#)  
["Greening Your Purchase of Cleaning Products: A Guide For Federal Purchasers"](#)

Additional information is available from your insurance company on many of these topics.

## **Whom do I contact for more information?**

Bureau of School Approval & Facility Management  
NH Department of Education  
101 Pleasant Street  
Concord, NH 03301  
(603) 271-3620