

Spotlight



FEATURE ARTICLE

Summer Projects: Non-Routine Tasks

Slow Down Before You Start

For many school districts and community colleges, summer provides an opportunity to complete projects that cannot be performed while students and staff are on campus. Classrooms are renovated, furniture is moved, playgrounds are repaired, equipment is serviced, and maintenance projects move to the top of the list.

While campuses may feel quieter during the summer months, the work being performed is often more hazardous than normal daily operations.

Many summer injuries occur during non-routine tasks, work that employees do not perform regularly. These activities may involve lifting and moving heavy materials, operating unfamiliar equipment, climbing ladders, entering mechanical spaces, working outdoors in the heat, or performing maintenance projects that require different tools and procedures than employees use during the regular school year.

The danger of non-routine work is that employees may underestimate the risks. A task may appear simple because it only needs to be completed once, but unfamiliar work often creates unexpected hazards. Before beginning any summer project, take a moment to assess the work.

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Summer Projects: Non-Routine Tasks Slow Down before You Start



Ask yourself:

- Have I been trained to perform this task?
- Am I authorized to use this equipment?
- Do I understand the hazards involved?
- Do I have the proper personal protective equipment?
- Is additional help needed to complete the work safely?
- Have I inspected the area for potential hazards?

Summer projects frequently involve lifting and material handling. Use carts, dollies, forklifts, or other mechanical assistance whenever possible, and team lift oversized or awkward loads to reduce the risk of strains and sprains.

Another common source of injuries occurs when employees operate equipment they rarely use. Pressure washers, floor scrubbers, aerial lifts, power tools, and landscaping equipment can present significant risks when operated without proper training. If training or a refresher is needed, stop and obtain it before proceeding.

Employees should also be aware of environmental hazards associated with summer work. High temperatures, direct sunlight, and extended outdoor activities increase the risk of heat illness. Stay hydrated, take breaks in shaded or cooled areas, and recognize the signs of heat exhaustion and heat stroke.

For custodians, maintenance staff, grounds crews, and substitute employees who may be assisting with summer projects, looking out for one another is an important part of staying safe.

If you notice a coworker struggling with a task, using equipment incorrectly, or appearing unsure of a procedure, take the time to offer assistance and guidance. Summer work often brings together employees with different levels of experience, and a few minutes spent teaching, coaching, or demonstrating the correct way to perform a task can prevent injuries and build confidence. Creating a culture where employees feel comfortable asking questions and helping one another ensures everyone goes home safely at the end of the day.

With fewer employees on campus during the summer, workers may also find themselves working alone. Communicate your location, maintain regular check-ins, and avoid performing hazardous work alone whenever possible.

Additional prevention strategies can further reduce the risk of injury during summer projects. Conduct a brief pre-task safety meeting to review the scope of work, identify hazards, and assign responsibilities. Inspect tools, ladders, extension cords, and equipment before use, and remove damaged items from service. Keep work areas clean and organized to prevent slips, trips, and falls. Use proper lockout/tagout procedures when servicing equipment, and ensure guards and safety devices remain in place. When contractors and employees are working in the same area, communicate clearly about hazards and work activities to avoid unexpected exposures.

The quieter pace of summer can create a false sense of security. In reality, many serious workplace injuries occur during maintenance projects and special assignments because employees are performing work outside their normal routines.

Take time to plan before beginning any project. Review procedures, identify hazards, verify training requirements, inspect equipment, and ask questions when something does not seem right. A few extra minutes spent preparing can prevent an injury that lasts long after summer break has ended.

At ASCIP, we encourage all employees to remember that safety does not take a vacation. Summer projects are important, but completing them safely is the most important goal of all.

Full article and resources at ascip.org/safety-spotlight →

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