

Developing an Equipment Maintenance and Safety Program

Intended for VT School Facility Operations

Types of School Equipment

This is a general list of equipment that should be incorporated in a school equipment maintenance program.

- Grounds and landscaping equipment
 - Snow removal equipment
 - Tree care equipment
 - Aerial lifts
 - Utility vehicles
 - Tractors
 - Storage and handling equipment
 - Custodial equipment
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Considerations for Facility Operations

The reason to keep your equipment properly maintained and in safe working condition is to reduce injuries, prevent damage, and ensure proper operation. From a compliance perspective, it's also important that employers have documentation.

User Manuals

User manuals will be the most important aspect in developing a school equipment maintenance and safety program. Every user manual will have all information related to properly maintaining your equipment, helping to develop a training program, and ensuring safe operation. Collect all user manuals of your equipment then file and organize for easy access. Consider digitizing for easier access, as most manuals can be found online. Digitizing will also help if using software to help equipment maintenance and safety program.

Utilizing Technology and Setting up Preventive Maintenance

Most facility management programs utilize software such as computer maintenance and management systems (CMMS). These help setup preventive maintenance programs and can help organize a proper equipment maintenance schedule as outlined in the user manual. All equipment maintenance should be on a schedule especially seasonal types of equipment. A CMMS can also help with scheduling training and ensuring you have the proper safety equipment. It's a way to document that you have performed proper maintenance and training. Documenting inspections of the equipment is a great way to ensure compliance and proof that the school is keeping their equipment in safe working condition.

Training and PPE

Before using any equipment the employer/school administration should be providing training and ensuring that their staff is aware of all hazards associated with the operation of the equipment. Schools should also ensure that they are providing personal protective equipment (PPE) such as protective eyewear, gloves, and hearing protection. It's a requirement that employees wear PPE and follow employer's training and procedures. For more on providing PPE, refer to the following resource:

https://www.osha.gov/sites/default/files/Handout_2_Employers_Must_Provide_and_Pay_for_PPE.pdf.

Lock Out Tag Out

If schools elect to perform their own maintenance, then it's important that all equipment be de-energized. Once de-energized you should lock and tag it out to prevent reenergizing while performing maintenance on the equipment. Consider contracting out the work as a way to transfer the risk, reduce the burden/tasks for your staff, and utilize qualified professionals.

Security

Some of the equipment will be stored in maintenance sheds and theft and tampering can be of concern. It's important to ensure equipment is locked away and even under surveillance if possible. You also want to prevent unwanted use of equipment so storage of keys in safe locations, or even locking out the equipment, may be necessary.

Chemicals/Flammable Liquids Storage

Most equipment comes with different types of chemicals such as lubricants and gas. All chemicals associated with your equipment should be part of your hazard communication plan and a safety data sheet will need to be gathered. Proper training and PPE will need to be provided when using these chemicals. Storage of flammable liquids is also a concern and purchasing a flammable cabinet to store these liquids will be necessary.

Warranties/Insurance Coverages

Equipment generally comes with a warranty and these should be documented. These can also be documented within a CMMS to help organize and easily access the information. Most district owned equipment will be covered under the GL policy for any resulting bodily injury or property damage that might result from the use of equipment used to maintain the premises (lawn mower, weed whacker, etc.). An injury to the employee would be covered under workers comp.

Rentals/Contracting the Work

VSBIT does not recommend allowing the use of employee-owned equipment. Equipment to be used by school staff should be owned and maintained by the school/district. This is because the equipment itself would be considered personal property of others and if it was known to be used to maintain the school grounds there is a very easy argument that the school would be responsible for repair/replacement of the equipment if anything happened to it. You would basically have all the risks of owning equipment without any of the benefits of actually owning the equipment.

Sometimes there are circumstances where equipment is to be rented and used by school staff in which there should be a rental agreement outlining requirements and safe use. VSBIT recommends contracting out most work that would require use of certain high hazard equipment and operations. Reducing the need for equipment and contracting out the work will help reduce liability on the school/district. Making these decisions between in-house and contracting will be about balancing needs, importance of operation, budget, capacity of school facility team, and overall liability of the operation.

For more information or questions on school equipment maintenance and safety please contact VSBIT's Risk Management Team: <https://www.vsbite.org/contact>.