

Facts for Secretaries

GUIDELINES FOR LOCAL LEADERS

Violence

Secretaries often work with students whose behavior puts them, other students, and staff at risk of harm. Secretaries share in the responsibility for the safety of children. That responsibility extends to protecting or reducing the severity of potential student injuries, including those from fighting or assaults. Physical intervention is not required if it would create a physical danger to you. However, common sense and reasonableness require the use of steps such as:

- Calling for assistance, sending someone for help, or calling 911 if the altercation is out of control.
- Dispersing the crowd. By removing the audience, the motivation to fight may be reduced.
- Removing or pushing aside items from the area. This will reduce the risk of further injury due to falls. It will also keep students from using these objects as weapons.

Ergonomics

Ergonomics is the study of the interaction of employees and the equipment and tools with which they work. Technological advances have led to more intensive computer work for many secretaries. Some spend most of their workday sitting in front of a computer screen. This can have damaging health effects.

Back/Neck Problems can be caused by sitting for long periods of time.

The stress of leaning over printouts and paperwork, sitting in an uncomfortable chair and spending long hours in one position leaves many secretaries with aching, tired backs. Ensuring that secretaries are provided with foot rests and the chance to move around

You can protect yourself and minimize the risk of assault through your local association by:

- Seeking inservice training on topics such as:
 - Intervening and resolving conflicts safely.
 - Reducing staff victimization.
 - Handling angry parents.
 - Weapons awareness.
- Conducting a worksite analysis to identify existing hazards for workplace violence.
- Seeking the installation of alarms and other security devices.
- Joining or helping to form an association health and safety committee to work on these issues by:
 - Insisting the district follows procedures outlined in state law (N.J.S.A. 18A:37-2.1) – Assaults upon school employees and state law (N.J.S.A 18A:37-2.2) – Assaults with weapons upon school employees.
 - Ensuring that any school safety plan puts the full responsibility on the district for protecting employees, and involves administration and law enforcement.

and rest their hands and arms rather than sitting in one position at a keyboard all day can minimize these problems. Short breaks throughout the day can vary the pace of the work and prevent strain injuries. Secretaries can be rotated among tasks that require using different motions or muscles, and their jobs can be reorganized in ways that create more rest or variety.

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome and other repetitive stress injuries are caused when the same hand and wrist movements are repeated day in and day out. The excess strain causes tendons to swell and press on the main nerve of the hand. This persistent irritation of the nerve can result in pain, numbness, and dysfunction

HEALTH & SAFETY RESOURCES

Your NJEA UniServ Office

Region 1 Vineland 856 696 2670	Cape May/ Cumberland
Region 2 Woodbury 856 628 8650	Gloucester/Salem
Region 3 Voorhees 856 782 1225	Camden
Region 5 Moorestown 856 234 2485	Burlington
Region 6 Galloway Twp. 609 652 9200	Atlantic
Region 7 Toms River 732 349 0280	Ocean
Region 8 Lawrenceville 609 896 3422	Mercer
Region 9 West Long Branch 732 403 8000	Monmouth
Region 11/12 Edison 732 287 4700	Middlesex
Region 13 Flemington 908 782 2168	Hunterdon/ Somerset
Region 15 Cranford 908 709 9440	Union
Region 17 Parsippany 973 515 0101	Morris
Region 19 West NY 201 861 1266	Hudson – North
Region 20 Jersey City 201 653 6634	Hudson – South
Region 21 South Orange 973 762 6866	Essex
Region 23 Emerson 201 265 6200	Bergen – East
Region 25 Hasbrouck Heights 201 292 8093	Bergen – West
Region 27 Wayne 973 694 0154	Passaic County
Region 28 Stanhope 973 347 5717	Sussex/Warren
Region 29 Hamilton Square 609 689 9580	Higher Education

Ergonomics *(continued from pg. 1)*

not only in the hands and wrists, but may extend up to the forearm and elbow as well. This problem can be minimized if secretaries are provided with adjustable equipment. The keyboard, computer screen, chair and documents should all be able to be modified to suit individual needs.

Eyestrain, fatigue, and headaches can be caused when computer screens are incorrectly positioned. Screens should be at least 28 inches away from the user. The top of the screen should be at eye level or slightly lower. Different adjustments may be needed if bifocals are worn. Either mounting adjustable arms to the wall or the use of adjustable stands can achieve this.

Indoor Air Quality

Secretaries spend most of their workdays in school buildings and offices. The World Health Organization estimates that approximately 30 percent of all buildings have an indoor air quality (IAQ) problem. Much research and attention has been focused on a whole host of indoor air contaminants and stressors in buildings. Formaldehyde, radon, bacteria, fungi, carbon monoxide, hydrocarbons, particulates, nitrogen oxides, ozone, fiberglass, tobacco smoke, temperature, humidity and poor ventilation top the list. Any of the aforementioned may be a cause of IAQ problems.

Symptoms associated with IAQ problems may include eye, nose, throat, and upper respiratory irritation, skin irritation or rashes, chills, fever, cough, chest tightness, congestion, sneezing, runny nose, muscle aches, and pneumonia. Illnesses associated with IAQ problems include asthma, hypersensitivity, pneumonitis, multiple chemical sensitivity, and Legionnaires' Disease.

How can IAQ Problems be corrected and/or prevented?

- Ensure an adequate outside air supply and that the ventilation system is balanced so that it operates at its original design specifications.
- Eliminate or control known and potential sources of chemical and microbial air contamination.
- Opening windows, when possible, is also a simple way to increase the flow of fresh air.

What you can do strive to fit the job to the person, not the person to the job.

- Secretaries should never be required to work at computer screens for long, uninterrupted periods of time.
- Work should be planned so that there will be breaks or changes in activity.
- Secretaries should be offered eye tests before they start work on a computer and once every three years thereafter.
- Wearing monofocal glasses instead of bifocal or trifocal glasses can prevent strain. Some people may need a special pair of glasses just for computer work.
- Work stations need to be evaluated in order to determine if changes are necessary.

What can be done if the air quality is unacceptable?

Through your local association:

- Conduct employee interviews to obtain pertinent information regarding what symptoms are being experienced, how many employees are affected, when they are affected, where they work, what they do, etc.
- Review building operations and maintenance procedures to determine when and what type of chemicals are being used during cleaning, floor waxing and stripping, painting, gluing, pesticide spraying, roofing operations, renovation and construction activities, etc. Also determine when deliveries occur since idling vehicles generate exhaust. New carpeting, upholstered furniture, partitions, etc. may give off chemical vapors for several months.
- Conduct a walk-through inspection to evaluate possible sources that may contribute to IAQ complaints.
- Inspect the HVAC system, window air conditioners, office dehumidifiers, etc., in order to determine if the systems are working properly and are in good condition.
- Review the building blueprints of the duct work and ventilation system to determine if the system is adequately designed.
- Check compliance with the PEOSH Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) Standard.

For more information

New Jersey Healthy School Facility Environments
www.state.nj.us/health/healthyschools/
Access to the online resources of seven New Jersey state agencies and federal agencies on issues such as indoor air quality, mold, hazardous substances, and construction dust and noise.

EPA Healthy Schools, Healthy Kids
<https://www.epa.gov/schools>
EPA Healthy Schools, Healthy Kids is a gateway to online resources to help facility managers, school administrators, architects, design engineers, school nurses, parents, teachers and other staff to address environmental health issues in schools.

New Jersey Education Association (NJEA)
180 West State Street
PO Box 1211
Trenton, New Jersey 08607-1211
609 599 4561
njea.org click on Issues for Health and Safety

National Education Association (NEA)
1201 16th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036-3290
202 833 4000
www.nea.org
<http://nea.healthyfutures.org>

PEOSH – NJ Dept. of Health
(Health hazards complaints)
PO Box 360
Trenton, NJ 08625-0360
609 984 1863
<http://nj.gov/health/peosh>

PEOSH – NJ Dept. of Labor and Workforce Development
(Safety hazards and discrimination complaints)
PO Box 386
Trenton, NJ 08625-0386
609 633 3896/800 624 1644
<http://www.nj.gov/health/workplacehealthandsafety/peosh/compform.shtml>

New Jersey Work Environment Council (WEC)
(Labor, community, environment coalition)
7 Dunmore Ave., First Floor East
Ewing, NJ 08618
609 882 6100
E-mail: info@njwec.org
www.njwec.org

For Assistance:

- Contact your association representative immediately. Your local or the NJEA UniServ office can help you with Workers' Compensation. You are entitled under state law (N.J.S.A.18A:30-2.1) "...to full salary without loss of sick days for up to one year..." and all medical treatment.