

Facts for Custodial & Maintenance Employees

GUIDELINES FOR LOCAL LEADERS

Asbestos

Custodial and maintenance employees often risk on-the-job contact with asbestos. It has been used in approximately 3,000 products including:

- Fireproofing and insulation in buildings.
- Insulation for pipes and boilers.
- Putties, caulks, paints, and cements.
- Friction products, such as clutch facings and brake linings in vehicles.

Asbestos containing material (ACM) is dangerous if the asbestos fibers are released. Once they are floating freely in the air, asbestos fibers can be inhaled and cause disease.

Hard asbestos-containing material such as vinyl floor tile does not generally create exposure problems. However, fibers can be released if the material is sanded, cut, ground or disturbed in some other way. Therefore, any material that contains asbestos has the potential to release fibers and to be hazardous.

How to Know if a Product Contains Asbestos?

The only way to know if material contains asbestos is to send a piece of the material to a qualified laboratory.

How does Asbestos enter the Body?

The most common way for asbestos to enter the body is through breathing. Asbestos can also enter the digestive tract while eating or smoking in a contaminated area. Asbestos does not pass through the skin.

How Should Asbestos be Handled?

In 1986, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued the Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act (AHERA), which covers all K-12 schools and regulates the inspection, abatement, and management of ACM. The EPA and the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services (NJDHSS) recommend a proactive management program whenever ACM is present. NJDHSS also recommends periodic inspections to make sure in-place asbestos is in good condition. Removal is required during building demolition, renovation or maintenance.

Testing and removal of asbestos is a highly specialized job. Only properly trained employees should be involved in asbestos testing and removal. If you believe asbestos is present in a work area, do not handle the material. Ask the district to have it tested. Should you have concerns about how an asbestos removal project is being handled, call NJDHSS (609-633-6224).

HEALTH & SAFETY RESOURCES

Your NJEA UniServ Office

Region 1 – Galloway Twp. 609 652 9200	Atlantic/ Cape May
Region 2 – Mullica Hill 856 628 8650	Cumberland/ Gloucester/Salem
Region 3 – Voorhees 856 234 2485	Burlington Camden
Region 7 – Toms River 732 349 0280	Ocean
Region 8 – Trenton 609 896 3422	Mercer
Region 9 – Wall Twp. 732 403 8000	Monmouth
Region 11/12 – Edison 732 287 4700	Middlesex
Region 13 – Flemington 908 782 2168	Hunterdon/ Somerset/Warren
Region 15 – Cranford 908 709 9440	Union
Region 17 – Parsippany 973 515 0101	Morris/Sussex
Region 19 – West NY 201 861 1266	Hudson – North
Region 20 – Jersey City 201 653 6634	Hudson – South
Region 21 – Livingston 973 762 6866	Essex
Region 23/25 – Hasbrouck Heights 201 292 8093	Bergen
Region 27 – Wayne 973 694 0154	Passaic
Region 29 – Trenton 609 689 9580	Higher Education

What your association can do:

- Form a health and safety committee to monitor conditions in the workplace.
- Negotiate health and safety language.
- File grievances regarding unsafe conditions using existing contract language.
- See that training is provided through inservice days.
- Assure that the district complies with the N.J. Public Employee Occupational Safety and Health Act (PEOSH).
- Work with parent and community groups to eliminate and/or prevent hazardous conditions.

Violence

Custodial and maintenance employees hold positions that involve frequent manual lifting and pulling that can have damaging health effects.

Hernias can be caused by straining to lift an object due to increased pressure in the abdomen.

Back Problems, although common among the general population, can be more severe and longer in duration among those who perform heavy work. Strain on the back caused by frequent lifting can lead to changes in the structure of the spine. These problems can be minimized by ensuring that employees are matched to jobs for which they are physically suited and that lifting is done in the proper manner.

What You Can Do

- Keep the work environment safe. Floors should never be slippery. Trafficked lanes should be clear of objects.

- Employees should be encouraged to never strain against a load. While they may have the muscular strength to overcome an excessive load, such straining could lead to devastating long-term effects.
- Employees should rest when they are tired. Tired muscles are less well coordinated and the employees may not be able to safely perform even light tasks.
- The use of mechanical lifting devices, such as fork-lifts, hand trucks, conveyors, lifting tackle, hoists and cranes should be used to assist the worker whenever possible.
- Two employees should perform lifting and carrying which is too difficult for one.
- Employees should be offered training in exercises for lower back pain.

Chemical Exposure

In the United States, there are over 60,000 chemicals in use in the workplace. Public employees in NJ are covered by PEOSH and the Worker and Community Right to Know Act of 1985 that gives workers the right to know about chemical hazards in their workplaces. Custodial and maintenance employees are exposed regularly to a variety of these chemicals. Some chemicals are more dangerous than others – try to substitute less dangerous chemicals and always wear protective gear.

What substances are covered?

OSHA has a minimum list of about 500 chemicals that are regulated. About 200 of these may cause cancer.

SDS – the Safety Data Sheet

An MSDS is a fact sheet on a single chemical or a mixture of chemicals. It is prepared by the manufacturer or the importer and given to your employer along with the product. During the work shift,

you and your union representative have the right to see the SDS for any products containing hazardous chemicals.

An SDS must contain very specific information:

- Identity of the hazardous ingredients
- Workplace exposure limits
- Chemical characteristics
- Fire and/or explosion hazards
- Health effects
- Routes of entry into the body
- Potential to cause cancer
- Precautions for safe handling
- Control measure
- Emergency first aid procedures
- Name, address, and phone number of the manufacturer or distributor
- Date the SDS was prepared

Training on hazardous substances should be provided annually; when your job assignment changes; and when a new chemical is introduced into your work area.

For more information

New Jersey Healthy School Facility Environments

<https://www.nj.gov/dep/school>

Access to the online resources of New Jersey state and federal agencies on issues such as indoor air quality, mold, asbestos, lead, and drinking water.

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

<https://www.njea.org/health-safety-publications/>

National Education Association (NEA)

1201 16th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036-3290
202 833 4000

<https://www.nea.org/healthy-schools>

PEOSH – NJ Dept. of Health

(Health hazards complaints)

PO Box 360
Trenton, NJ 08625-0360
609 984 1863

<https://www.nj.gov/health/workplace/healthandsafety/peosh/index.shtml>

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

<https://www.nj.gov/health/workplace/healthandsafety/peosh/compform.shtml>

New Jersey Work Environment Council (WEC)

(Labor, community, environment coalition)

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.