Safety Inspections Help Stop Accidents in Their Tracks

One of the most effective ways for community colleges to reduce on-the-job accidents is by identifying and correcting occupational health and safety hazards found during periodic safety inspections. The Environmental Health and Safety Institute will be conducting campus wide safety inspections at community colleges across the state this year, and we wanted to share with you our inspection priorities. Not only can this information help you be prepared for EHSI’s visit to your campus, but most importantly, it will help you eliminate these hazards as quickly as possible further reducing the likelihood of accidents. The items listed as inspection priorities are in no particular order and are listed because they fall under one or more of the following criteria: they are the most frequent causes of accidents on community college campuses; they are among the most frequently cited violations in EHSI inspections; they are listed in the NC OSH publication “Top Ten OSH Violations cited by NCDOL in 2010.”

- **Slip and Trip Hazards** are by far the number one cause of accidents at community colleges. EHSI inspectors are always keeping their eyes on sidewalks to look for potential problems. Let’s work together to identify slip and trip hazards, especially broken and uneven walkways. Consider budgeting funds for their repair every year so you can stay ahead!
- **Machine Guarding** is a very important component of the safety programs in our technical programs like welding, carpentry and machining. Some of the most frequently cited safety standards involve the guarding of moving parts on machines like band saws, radial arm saws, drill presses, table saws, lathes and grinders (tongue guard and work rest). While accidents involving these pieces of equipment are rare in community colleges, the severity of accidents resulting from the improper use of this equipment should encourage you to make their inspection a priority. These machines should not only be properly equipped with guards, but employees using the machines should also be utilizing personal protective equipment.
- **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)** should be provided to employees to every time they are exposed to a hazard identified in a job hazard assessment that can’t be engineered out of their work environment. The PPE most commonly utilized at community colleges is safety glasses. Teachers and students in classes like chemistry, auto body/automotive repair, welding, machining and carpentry/woodworking should don safety glasses anytime they are in the hands-on part of their education. Many of the tasks associated with grounds, maintenance and custodial work require the use of safety glasses as well. Be sure your employees and students are protecting their eyesight any time there is a risk of flying objects or chemical splashes.
- **Electrical Safety** doesn’t only apply to electricians. Electrical safety issues are identified frequently in all areas of community colleges. The most common issues involve damaged plugs that are missing the ground pin or damaged cords with exposed wiring. These damaged plugs and cords are found most commonly on custodial equipment like vacuum cleaners and floor buffers, and powered hand tools like side grinders and circular saws. Consider an equipment inspection program that will ensure that this type of equipment is periodically inspected and repaired or removed from service as soon as the electrical hazards are identified.

Are you ready for your annual inspection? Would you like a specific area of your college inspected? Contact your Environmental Health and Safety Institute specialist to assist. Call 828-694-1767 or email brcc-ehsi@blueridge.edu.
For a change of pace I thought I might write about my trip to Haiti. I went to Haiti on September 4th with my church in conjunction with the North Carolina Baptist Men’s Association. Different churches have been sending teams all year and each team stays for one week. Our team was divided into one construction unit and two medical units. I was on construction.

Construction consisted of building cement block houses. They measured 12 x 16 feet with a single pitch metal roof. Every house has a steel door and two windows that were really just vents for air circulation. Each house costs about $2500 to build. I was primarily a “helper,” but we had three on our team that were experienced masons. We also had several local Haitian men that worked with us daily. They were experienced masons too, and one served as our driver and interpreter. French-Creole is spoken in Haiti, but when the masons ran out of mortar, they all knew how to yell for “more mud”!

Driving through the towns and beyond, the sides of the roads and hills are covered with tent cities. Tents, almost touching each other, line the roads for miles. Here it is nearly two years past the earthquake and thousands still have no permanent home. Running water and electricity do not exist here. Community hand-pump wells are always busy and everyone carries water in a 5 gallon bucket. Open-air markets are everywhere. Taxis, which are covered pickup trucks called ‘tap-taps’ crowd the streets.

The weather was extremely hot and humid. The heat index was over 100 degrees every day. The house we stayed in was not air conditioned, but several nights we had a cooling rain shower right before bedtime. We started work about 7:30 each morning and finished about 3pm each day. It was too hot to work past 3 o’clock. We drank tons of water and gatorade, used plenty of sunscreen, wore wide brim hats and took lots of breaks.

Despite the precautions, one member of a medical unit, Denise Clemmer, died from complications related to the heat. On Wednesday, her unit held a field clinic in a remote area, outdoors under a shade tree. After being in the heat all day, the medical team returned to our compound and began organizing and preparing supplies and equipment for the next day. Denise tried to help them but appeared confused and disoriented. The team members, including three doctors, were helping her get inside the house when they noticed how hot she felt. After taking her temperature (over 105 degrees), they began pouring water and ice on her. They transported her to the nearest hospital but she died on the way.

EHSI has tried to raise awareness of summer heat issues at our community colleges. We have offered training programs in person and on-line through the EHSI SafetyNet. Also the EHSI staff has written articles for the Safety Measures newsletter.

Please don’t take heat issues lightly. If you are not feeling well after spending time in the heat and sun, please let someone know before it is too late. And look out for each other too. Summer is now over, but plan to deal with next year’s summer heat, seriously and responsibly. Let’s all make sure we go home at the end of the day.

For more information on heat strokes and summer heat issues, contact EHSI at 828-694-1767 or email EHSI@blueridge.edu
2011 has been a very active year for disasters in the United States and many have occurred in North Carolina. What are some of the natural disasters we could face? There could be hurricanes, floods, tornados, thunderstorms and lightning, winter storms and extreme cold, summer heat, earthquakes, landslides (mud slides), volcanoes, tsunamis, fires and wild fires just to name a few. With the exception of volcanoes and tsunamis we have experienced all of the above in North Carolina in 2011.

In addition to natural disasters we could also experience hazmat incidents (chemical and nuclear) and terrorist activites which could be CBRN (Chemical Biological Radiological Nuclear). These last two types of disaster will have to be covered at another time since press time is near.

Hurricane Irene just proved the old baseball adage “Be Prepared for Anything.” In most states and areas, people were prepared for the wind. They boarded up and/or evacuated to safe areas to escape the heavy winds expected. What most people were not expecting was heavy rain causing the ground to get over saturated and trees to become easily up rooted. Also the heavy rain caused flash flooding in some areas at never before seen levels. The effects of Hurricane Irene included power outages to millions of people and severe flood damage to cities and homes.

So what should we do to prepare for the disaster to come? Almost all emergency agencies, weather services and news outlets will have similar emergency guidelines to prepare for and actions to take during an emergency.

Some of the things we should prepare for as recommended by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, American Red Cross and the National Weather Service are:

• Gather information about disasters and hazards that may affect you, both at home and when traveling (i.e. in a tsunami area).
• Develop an emergency plan and review and practice it with family members.
• Collect and assemble disaster suppliers and kits (i.e. Food, flashlight, first aid kit, clothing for the season and cash).
• Know where to seek shelter from all hazards in your area.
• Know the local warning systems and evacuation routes (many cities have evacuation routes signed on highways).
• Study what to do for specific hazards.
• Communications for family members i.e. contact a designated family member away from your location to collect family information if local communication isn’t working well. Also have cell phones well charged and charging equipment.
• Know where and how to shut – off utilities such as electric, gas, water, etc.
• Have insurance and other vital records ready to move quickly.
• Have medicine and equipment for any special needs.
• Children’s items for a long trip (games, favorite toys, books, etc.).
• Animal care items and food.
• Other equipment and items necessary for your family.
• Study and practice safety skills and how to operate safety equipment.
• Study how to operate any emergency equipment i.e. generators and LPG grills (outside use only even in bad weather and conditions).

The recommended preparations are important but are only the minimum that would be required in a disaster. The disaster and conditions would dictate additional requirements and preparations that need to be adapted to. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and most Emergency Services will state that you need to be self-sufficient for three (3) days or more. We all heard TV reports during Hurricane Irene where city, county, State and Federal emergency services stated they would not be able to respond to emergencies until the hurricane passed and it was safe to make responses.

Hopefully these guidelines will help you and your family safely navigate the next disaster that you encounter.
Ask EHSI

Answers to standards or regulations questions that are researched by the EHSI staff.

Is it OK to use a “For Household Use Only” rated coffee maker in a faculty lounge?

As far as OSHA is concerned it is OK. As long as the appliance is used in a manner that would be typical of home use. So making a couple of pots a day would be typical use. Appliances must be approved by a nationally recognized testing laboratory, such as Underwriters Laboratory (UL). The appliance should be in the proper working order including electrical wiring and plugs.

However your college may set their own policy regarding use of individual electrical appliances at work.

Recently at Asheville High School (NC), an energy audit found the annual energy costs for 48 mini-refrigerators was $3600, 45 microwaves was $1505, and 14 coffee makers was $322.

Q. Can we use Christmas lights on campus in our holiday decorations?

OSHA states in 29CFR1910.305(a)(2)(i) temporary electrical power and lighting installations of 600 volts, nominal or less may be used only as follows: [B] For a period not to exceed 90 days for Christmas decorative lighting, carnivals, and similar purposes. So who says OSHA doesn’t have a heart? Happy Holidays from EHSI!

EHSI SafetyNet Training Schedule

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<th>Date</th>
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<td>Hazard Communication &amp; Bloodborne Pathogen Awareness</td>
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<td>Hazard Communication &amp; Bloodborne Pathogen Awareness</td>
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