

Safety Newsletter

Merced County Schools Insurance Group

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EXTENSION CORD SAFETY ----- TAKE NO CHANCES!

We often use extension cords but overlook the hazards that using extension cords present. Did you know that there are about 4000 injuries and 3300 fires associated with extension cord use every year?



Extension cords are very useful devices, but they can present a fire or shock hazard when either worn out or used improperly.

- Extension cords come in either two or three-wire types.
- Two-wire extension cords should only be used to operate one or two small appliances and no more than 3 standard strands of lights.
- Three-wire cords are used for outdoor applications and electric power tools.
- Extension cords must be treated with care and checked regularly for damage or deterioration.
- The cord itself should *never* be *pulled* to disconnect it from an electrical source; remove it by the plug.
- Extension cords should not be placed under rugs or furniture and should never be strung through doorways, windows, walls, ceilings, or floors.
- Damaged cords present a potential fire or shock hazard and should be destroyed and replaced immediately. Don't try to fix it with tape!
- An extension cord should never be used as a substitute for permanent wiring.
- Do not fasten to a building or structure, even though staples are sold for this purpose at hardware stores.
- Avoid plugging two cords together to make a longer one.
- Extension cords which are either connected together, or are too long will reduce operating voltage and may cause appliance damage.
- Use good housekeeping practices to keep extension cords from being a tripping hazards or becoming damaged.
- Inspect them regularly for wear. Replace defective units.

Prevent potential electrical hazards that may lead to an injury!



Air quality and Winter Classrooms

Did you know that students in unventilated rooms show lower test scores as a result of high CO2 levels? Everyone exhales Carbon dioxide. Moisture is also in the air that we exhale. This moisture drives up the humidity in the room and can make it uncomfortably muggy. High humidity levels also assist in mold growth and no one wants that. Finally, a closed up classroom allows those cold and flu viruses and illnesses that are so prevalent in the winter to accumulate. Occupants of rooms without ventilation are more likely to get colds, flus, and other airborne illnesses.



Fortunately, there is a simple solution. HVAC units, besides heating and cooling, are designed to exchange the room air with clean, filtered, outside air. This lowers the CO2 and moisture levels, and it removes those cold and flu germs that are floating in the air. Make sure that the HVAC fan is running continuously when the room is occupied, even if you think it's noisy. The added noise is a small price to pay for better health. Ask your M&O person to ensure that the outside vent is open to allow fresh air to come in. Your air will then be clean and fresh, even with the doors and windows closed. You'll be glad you did, and so will your students!

Foul Weather Driving Tips

Driving safely when the weather turns foul takes concentration and planning.

- Always wear your seat belt.
- Make sure your windshield and mirrors are clear of frost, snow and ice and the driver's seat is positioned properly.
- Plan ahead. Leave earlier than usual to allow extra time to reach your destination.
- Keep a "winter emergency kit" in your car. It should include a flashlight, flares, jumper cables, snacks, drinking water, warm clothes and some basic tools.
- Carefully assess road and driving conditions when driving on unfamiliar roads. Be especially cautious on bridges and on-ramps.
- Drive at speeds appropriate for road conditions. Use "defensive" driving attitude and actions.
- Keep your distance from other autos and obstacles.
- In a skid situation, if your car is equipped with an Anti-Lock Brake System (ABS) remember to maintain continuous pressure on your brakes. If your car does not have ABS, and you feel your car starting to skid, pump your brakes lightly. Turn your car to follow the direction of the skid to help maintain control.



Fog can be one of the most dangerous weather conditions for both new and experienced drivers. Fog has the potential to reduce visibility significantly, so it is critical that drivers stay focused on the road in order to stay safe. Here are three tips for driving in fog

- 1. Slow down.** Driving at normal speeds in fog can be very dangerous. Be sure to slow down so you have more time to react if traffic stops or other hazards appear.
- 2. Always low-beam headlights, never brights.** Avoid using high-beam headlights in fog as fog consists of tiny water droplets that spread and reflect light.
- 3. Stay focused on the road.** Driving in fog is not a time for multi-tasking. Turn down the radio, stop conversations with other passengers and keep your attention on the road. Roll down your window to hear other road traffic.

Remember, if the road and weather conditions are truly hazardous, reschedule your travel.

Prevent Back Injuries - Avoid Awkward Postures

Awkward postures - like bending and reaching, increase effort, cause fatigue, and can result in injury. In many cases they're wasted motions that increase the time to perform a task and reduce the quality of work.

Examples of Awkward Postures:

- Working with the arms raised.
- Bending at the back.
- Bending at the neck.
- Twisting.
- Reaching.
- Bending the wrists.
- Kneeling or squatting.



We have all been told to avoid back injury by bending our knees when we lift, keeping the load close and avoiding twisting motions. These safety rules may be appropriate for simple, direct lifting of materials, but what about back care when you are working in awkward positions? Work tasks that require you to reach or stretch away from your body while handling materials can also put excessive strain on the vertebral discs and soft tissues in the back. An awkward position is a work posture that distorts the spine from its natural curves, puts unbalanced pressure on the discs, and can strain arm, leg or back tissues if held for any length of time. What are some work situations that may put you in "awkward" positions?

1. Jobs that require you to bend at a table or to reach into bins or containers to retrieve or place material.
2. Overhead work, installing or servicing equipment, pulling wire, cleaning ceilings, etc.
3. Floor or ground level jobs such as installing or servicing equipment, cleaning, etc.
4. Work tasks in confined or small spaces where there is limited range of motion such as closets and crawl spaces, etc.
5. Jobs on ladders, work platforms or scaffolding where you may over-reach to adjust, clean, install or service.
6. Pulling loads, instead of pushing them, when removing equipment or other materials.
7. Repetitive tasks that require twisting of the back.

So, how can you avoid injury when working in one of those awkward positions?

- Raise tables or containers off the floor and/or tilt them to reduce bending and over-reaching.
- When working overhead, stand on a steady and adjustable platform. Keep your back posture in its natural curve.
- If working on the floor, avoid bending over to work. Squat down using your leg muscles and wear cushioned knee pads if you have to kneel at work.
- In confined spaces, plan your work, and reduce clutter in the area which confines you further and increases the need to twist or overreach. Also arrange for adequate illumination.
- Don't hold an awkward position for too long. Pause often to stretch and straighten out.
- When leaning forward to work, support the weight of your upper body on your free hand and arm, whenever



possible. This greatly relieves pressure on your lower back.

- Position yourself as close as possible to the job, avoid overreaching. Use tools with longer handles.
- Never lift heavy loads that are far away from your body's center of gravity. Get help.
- Keep the load in your "power zone". Position your work below the shoulder and above the knees to minimize over-reaching.
- Push, rather than pull, loads. This will help maintain the spine's natural curve.

Slips, Trip and Falls - Winter Safety Tips



- Plan ahead and give yourself sufficient time.
- When walking on steps, always use the hand railings and plant your feet firmly on each step.
- When walking on an icy or snow-covered walkway, take short steps and walk at a slower pace so you can react quickly to a change in traction.
- Bending your knees a little and taking slower and shorter steps increases traction and can greatly reduce your chances of falling.
- Look out for "black ice." Dew, fog or water vapor can freeze on cold surfaces and form an extra-thin, nearly invisible layer of ice that can look like a wet spot on the pavement. It often shows up early in the morning or in areas that are shaded from the sun.
- Carrying heavy items can challenge your sense of balance. Try not to carry too much--you need to leave your hands and arms free to better balance yourself.
- Be prepared to fall and try to avoid using your arms to break your fall. If you fall backward, make a conscious effort to tuck your chin so your head doesn't strike the ground with a full force.
- When entering a building, remove any dirt, mud, and water from your shoes.
- Use special care when entering and exiting vehicles--use the vehicle for support

Flu: Good Health Habits Can Stop Germs

The best way to prevent seasonal flu is to get vaccinated each year, but good health habits like covering your cough and washing your hands often can help stop the spread of germs and prevent respiratory illnesses like the flu.

1. Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
2. Stay home when you are sick.
3. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing
4. Washing your hands often will protect you from germs.
5. Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
6. Practice other good health habits. Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces at home, work or school, especially when someone is ill.



Finally - get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids, and eat nutritious food.