

## Schools and Pollution: Control Hazards to Control Risks

School should be a safe and healthy learning environment, but there is a significant hazard to children and young adults that many educational facilities overlook: pollution. Young people are much more susceptible to illness from pollutants than adults, and with countless sources of pollution, you should recognize the gravity of the risk.

A pollution incident or contaminant release in a school could cause large-scale injury, illness or even death among students and teachers. In addition to potentially massive bodily harm lawsuits, the school would also be responsible for other legal fees and cleanup costs. Plus, a large enough incident could cause a school to close or gain a bad reputation in the local community. Identify sources of pollution and take steps to mitigate these risks to avoid costly and preventable mistakes.

### Potential Pollution Sources

The following are examples of common pollutants in educational environments to watch out for:

- Fumes from fresh paint, new carpeting, cleaning chemicals or pesticides
- Drinking water
- Mold conditions
- HVAC systems
- Caulk containing harmful particles

- Poor ventilation
- Chemicals that have been improperly disposed of
- Chemicals from art and science classrooms
- Older buildings that deteriorate or malfunction, causing air or water contamination

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In the event of a pollution incident, you could be responsible for everything from legal fees to cleanup costs, and it could leave your school with a poor reputation in the community.

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- Elevated lead levels in drinking water
- Water contaminated by sidewalk salt, pesticides or other chemicals
- Polluted air from nearby building or car emissions

School buses are also a source of pollution because dangerous fumes can enter the enclosed space; however, educational facilities are generally only liable for this risk if they own and operate their own buses, though you should check your insurance coverage to be sure.

### Risk Management Techniques

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Be aware of possible pollutants and then work to mitigate or eliminate the hazard if possible. Here are some tips to get started:

- Develop, maintain and train staff on standard procedures for storing, handling and disposing of chemicals, pesticides and other hazardous materials.
- Have buildings regularly inspected and repaired, including HVAC systems, ventilation, faucets and pipes.
- Use minimal amounts of fertilizer when possible.
- Keep lockers and buildings clean and dry to avoid attracting pests.
- Use sand on slippery surfaces instead of salt.
- Keep the ground free of litter.
- Use safer alternatives to hazardous materials when possible.
- Ensure bus companies under contract with your facility install appropriate filtering devices on tailpipes to avoid fume leaks to the inside of the bus.
- When planning new construction, take distance from industrial buildings and highways into consideration.

It is crucial to purchase pollution insurance coverage to protect your students, staff and bottom line, as standard policies exclude any pollution related claims. For further information about pollution risk management or insurance coverage, contact BCG Advisors, Inc. today.