

An Overview of the Health and Safety Hazards at Custodian Sites



Project: SEIU888 Health and Safety

Site Coordinator: Dr. Beth Rosenberg/Rand Wilson

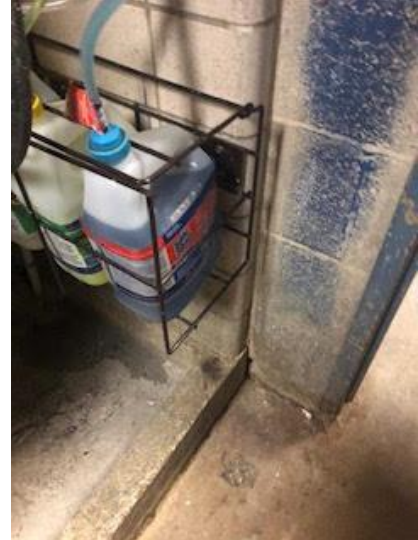
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Objective

- To analyze and assess the physical, chemical and biological hazards at the workplace settings for custodian and maintenance workers.
- This project was assigned by SEIU888.
- We were assisted and accompanied by field representatives of each school site.
- This internship was primarily based in Braintree
 - However, different school sites across Massachusetts were covered.





Massachusetts

-   Interstate, State Highway, State Route
-  County name

-  Interstate, Freeway
-  Toll Road
-  Highway, State Route
-  Primary Road
-  County boundary

Custodian work description

- They are responsible for:
 - Keeping buildings clean
 - Collecting trash
 - Sweeping
 - Mopping
 - Vacuuming
 - Utilizing equipment to clean floors
 - Cleaning and stocking bathrooms
 - Securing buildings
 - Maintenance duties-repairing, snow-shoveling



Basics of Custodial Work

● School Custodians

- General duties (day time): mopping, taking out trash, sanitizing classrooms
- Winter: Snow shoveling in addition to basic responsibilities.
- Summer: Building overhaul- waxing and stripping floors (requires moving all classroom furniture), furniture repair, large scale building projects

● Workday Shifts

- During the year: day (approx 6:00am-3:00pm) and night (2:00pm-10:00pm) with variations.
- Summer includes mostly daytime work.

● Custodians mostly engage in **solitary work**.

● There is a lot variation depending on how individual school districts/municipalities split up maintenance and ground work.





HAZARDS



Poor Chemical Storage Practices

- **Poor chemical storage practices**

- Unused chemicals are left in storage rooms.
 - **These are strong chemicals that release intense hazardous odors.**
 - **Often stored in older storage areas, covered with dust and rust.**
 - **No eye wash or body wash stations in case of a chemical injury.**
 - A few schools have two bottles of saline for eye washing in areas with poor hygiene.
- Not all schools have MSDS packets or have updated sheets on existing chemicals.
- Chemicals are kept in unsanitary conditions.



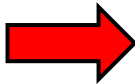
Chemical and Asbestos Exposure

- Exposure to harsh chemicals
- Sites are mostly built prior to the 1990's
 - Poor ventilation
 - Insufficient number of windows.
 - Some sites have windows that do not open.
 - Most sites do not have air-conditioning, except for administrative areas within building.
 - Asbestos issues are present in floor tiles, pipes and ceiling.



Dangers of Solitary Work

- Slips and falls occur regularly during waxing/stripping floors.
- Improper lifting techniques are not corrected.
- Sometimes proper techniques are known but not enough people are there to make it viable to practice.
- Snow shoveling injuries occur during wintertime.



Four Steps to Proper Lifting

FOUR STEPS TO PROPER LIFTING

1. SIZE UP THE LOAD

- Use a hand truck if possible.
- Get help if you need it.
- Check for splinters, nails, exposed staples.
- Use gloves if necessary.
- Make sure you have a clear path to where you are moving it to.



2. LIFT

- Bring the load as close to you as possible before lifting.
- Lift with your legs, not your back.
- Keep your head up, your back straight and bend at your hips.



3. MOVE

- Keep the load close to your body.
- Look where you are going.
- Shift your feet to turn, don't twist your body.



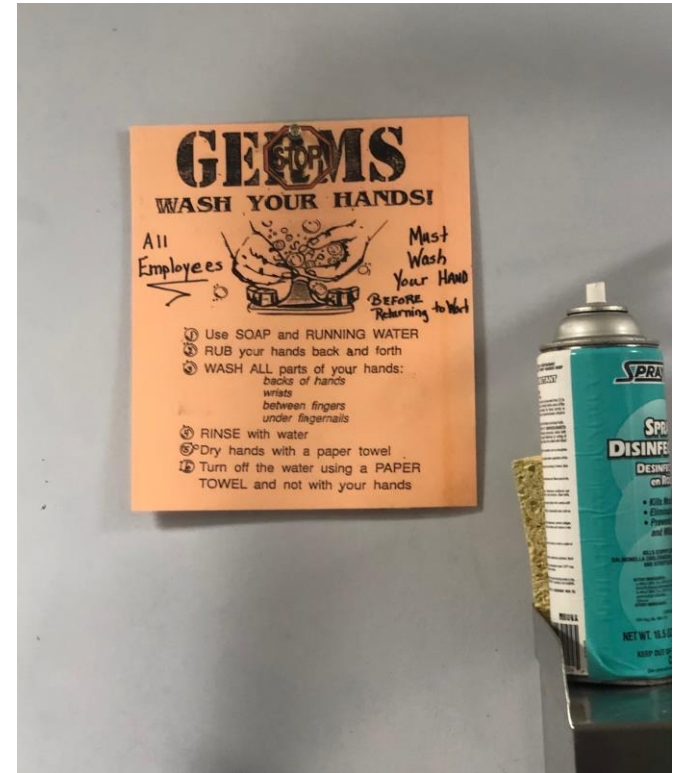
4. GET SET AND LOWER

- When setting a load down, let your leg muscles carry it down.
- Make certain your fingers and toes are clear before setting the load down.



Physical Illnesses

- Working in a school environment, there is continuous exposure to bodily fluids, including **blood, urine, and vomit**.
 - Little to no education on dealing with **bloodborne pathogens**
- It is not uncommon to struggle with diseases during the first few years, but many custodians describe reaching a threshold of immunity, so they stopped getting sick after a while.



Recommendations

● Equipment upgrades

- Vibe machine to eliminate the need of stripper chemical.
 - Most schools do not purchase due to the cost of this product.
- Eco-friendly chemical dispensers (no physical mixing or direct exposure)

● Mandated basic job training

● Safer chemical cleaner alternatives

- Green cleaning

● Updated safety training manuals

- Review of existing MSDS
 - Some schools do not have MSDS manuals, or custodians are unaware of the location.
- Must include floorcare, lifting, snow shoveling, and dealing with bodily fluids.

● Explicit inclusion of custodians in fire drills and shooting protocols with understanding of their liabilities and responsibilities.

● Working across schools in groups during the summer.

- “Chain Gang”



Internship Products/Deliverables

- Chemical product factsheets
 - **Floor care**
 - **Shoveling**
 - **Lifting**
 - **Asbestos**
 - **General sanitizer chemicals**
 - **Bloodborne pathogens**
 - **Chemical storage**
- OSHA training module (example)
- Recommendation manual for environment and human-health friendly products.
- Final report of health hazards at each selected location.

General Reflections

- As of this year, MA public employees are covered by new OSHA law
 - A few safety measures, precautions and trainings might be implemented as a result of this change.
- We were made aware that custodian jobs are considered “*unskilled*”.
 - However, duties such as stripping and waxing require skill-based trainings.
 - As a result, the custodian trade is taken too lightly by other professions and workplaces.
- Most school custodians start their jobs as a second career.
 - These are workers often in their **40s** and **50s** who have had entire other careers in other industries.
 - They are provided excellent health insurance.
 - They also receive government pension.
 - There is a pervasive mentality that all you need is “**common sense**”

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THANK YOU!!!