

Eyewash Stations and Safety Showers in Schools – Schoolboard Q3

Installing eyewash stations and safety showers in schools is essential for ensuring the safety of students and staff in the event of exposure to chemicals. The standards used to evaluate this equipment come from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and the American National Standards Institute (ANSI). Incorporating both standards allow employers to ensure proper evaluation, location, installation and ongoing upkeep. Before performing a risk assessment, employers need to understand both sets of guidelines. Using a combination of best management practices and standards from OSHA and ANSI will benefit the decision-making process.

The two applicable standards for eye wash stations and safety showers for your school are:

- 1) OSHA's Medical and First Aid Standard 29 CFR 1910.151
- 2) ANSI's Emergency Eyewash and Shower Standard Z358.1

Once you feel comfortable with the requirements of both standards, develop a process to perform an audit. A good way is to break the process down into 5 steps:

First – Conduct a Risk Assessment – In OSHA's Medical and First Aid Standard, section 1910.151(c) says, "Where the eyes or body of any person may be exposed to injurious corrosive materials, suitable facilities for quick drenching or flushing of the eyes and body shall be provided within the work area for immediate emergency use." Obtain the safety data sheets (SDS's) to evaluate which chemicals are considered corrosive. Then perform a walkthrough of the school to determine where these chemicals are used. Include laboratories, art studios, maintenance areas, bus garages, cleaning supply closets, pools and kitchens.

Second – Placement, Accessibility and Functionality- Eyewash stations and safety showers should be in accessible locations within reach of where corrosive materials are used or handled. The ANSI standard says that emergency equipment must be within 10 seconds walking time from the location of a hazard (or around 55 feet), except where a strong acid or caustic is used, the unit should be immediately adjacent. Travel to the emergency equipment must always remain clear and adequate signage must be used to identify its location. The eyewash station and safety shower must be easy to operate and water temperatures must be comfortable to the eyes. ANSI suggests a "tepid" water temperature, which is anywhere between 60 and 100 degrees. Water flow must be adequate for drenching the eyes for at least 15 minutes. Finally, a floor drain or other means for containing or collecting the used water should be established to help prevent slips and falls.

Third – Training and Education – Training is a vital component for ensuring a proper understanding of how to operate the equipment. All affected individuals must be well-versed in the appropriate steps for emergency procedures to minimize potential injury to the eyes or body. Regular drills can help identify areas of your plan in need of improvement. Always remember to document any training, education or drills.

Fourth - Maintenance and Inspection – Eyewash stations and safety showers should be regularly inspected for functionality, water flow, cleanliness and accessibility. Any deficiencies found should be corrected as soon as possible. Performing annual inspections to evaluate if the equipment still complies with OSHA and ANSI standards will provide a sense of security and reassurance that your safety measures are up to date.

Fifth—Emergency Response Procedures—Create a written procedure and incorporate it into the school’s safety program. Ensure it clearly outlines worker’s responsibilities in the event of an emergency. Be sure to review the procedure at least annually or whenever changes are required, such as when there are changes in responsibility, building renovations or new chemical usage.

Eyewashes and safety showers in schools are essential pieces safety equipment and must be located near areas with prevalent chemical hazards. When selecting the equipment, verify that it meets the current design standards and once the equipment is in place, train the staff and students. Ongoing inspection and testing can confirm the equipment is clear of obstructions, operable and maintained. Keep in mind that this equipment is not a substitute for protective devices such as safety glasses, goggles or face shields but should be available in addition to proper PPE.

If you need help identifying potential hazards in your workplace, please contact Andy Sawan, Risk Services Specialist at Sedgwick at andrew.sawan@sedgwick.com or 330-819-4728.