

SAFETY NOTICE: COVID-19 FACILITIES CARE - VACANCY

June 2020

The SPELL JIF recognizes the demands placed on district officials during the COVID-19 pandemic. These burdens are broad, fluid and unrelenting. **As plans develop for the safe return of staff and students in September, we wish to remind districts that, in addition to aggressive sanitation efforts, there are a number of related measures we recommend to ensure school facilities are properly maintained and inspected during this extended closure.**

Since mid-March, school facilities have been virtually vacant and lay dormant. This condition can lead to a number of unintended consequences. In an effort to bring these items to the attention of school officials, we offer the following recommendations:

SERVICE PROVIDERS:

- Contact all service providers. Ask if their staffing levels have been maintained during this pandemic. In the event of an emergency, districts that employee contracted or required, specific service such as elevator service, fire alarm and security service must ensure these companies can respond in a timely manner with properly trained staff.

HVAC SYSTEMS:

- Due to the extended closure, many districts have placed their school in an "unoccupied" state. This condition may disable or limit ventilation. As temperatures rise, districts may be tempted to return their buildings to an "occupied" state. Inspect your HVAC systems prior to activation, specifically those systems that incorporate cooling towers. Depending on the type of cooling tower, the water in these units could be contaminated as a result of a delay in operation. To prevent against conditions that may contribute to microbial growth in these towers, districts are strongly urged to work closely with their water treatment providers prior to activating these systems.
- If air conditioning systems are activated, adjust cooling set points in unoccupied spaces to no lower than 75 degrees. Setting temperatures lower encourages excess condensation.
- Change the filters in all HVAC equipment.

HUMIDITY:

- Humidity levels will soon rise. As relative humidity levels increase, districts are encouraged to improve ventilation within their facilities.
 - ***Keep classrooms and lavatory doors open now, and throughout the summer months.***
 - ***Inspect HVAC system controls to ensure the ventilation equipment is cycling properly, i.e. only running during the week day, not at night when humidity levels tend to rise, and not over the weekend.***
 - ***Inspect exhaust fans to verify operation.***
- Keep window shades up and blinds open. Mold grows in dark, moist environments. Increasing natural light and air circulation limits the opportunity for the spread of mold spores.

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WATER SYSTEMS:

- ☑ Water systems in schools have been dormant for several weeks. These conditions may lead to stagnations. Districts are strongly encouraged to flush the cold, and especially the hot water systems, in their facilities. In many cases, the domestic hot water systems in schools incorporate very large storage tanks. To avoid foul smelling or tasting water, these tanks should be flushed prior to the return of staff and students.
- ☑ For those districts using local wells to provide potable water, any treatment systems should also be flushed prior to the return of staff and students.

LAVATORY/KITCHEN/CLASSROOMS:

- ☑ All lavatory fixtures should be inspected and operated prior to staff and students returning. The extended school closures can result in septic traps running dry. This condition will result in sewer gases entering a building. All floor drains should also be “charged” (filled with water or an appropriate drain cleaning chemical).
- ☑ Inspect septic lift stations for proper operation. Tank floats have remained in the same position for several weeks. Run the water in lavatories for an extended period of time. This will “exercise” the tank floats. Inspect tanks during these exercises to ensure the tanks do not over flow. Test tank monitoring systems for proper operation.
- ☑ Inspect all refrigerators. Remove all contents not used over the summer.
- ☑ All ice machines should be turned off and drained.
- ☑ Inspect dishwashing and sanitizing systems. Inactivity of these systems could lead to clogged chemical nozzles.
- ☑ Inspect / clean drain traps in kitchens and art rooms. Clean as necessary.
- ☑ Run the sink faucets in science laboratories to charge the traps in chemical pits. The prolonged closure may result in dry plumbing traps.

INCREASED SANITATION EFFORTS:

- ☑ Minimize the amount of material in classrooms to only that material required to deliver instruction. Increased sanitation efforts will likely be part of the “norm” when classes resume. Custodial staff will need more time to perform this task. Reducing the amount of items in instructional spaces will increase the efficiency of the sanitation efforts.
- ☑ Increase the frequency of whole-building inspections. Diligent surveillance is the best defense against unintended consequences. Inspections should include spot checks of storage closets, file cabinets, kitchen freezer temperatures, food storage areas, etc.

Eliminating all facility related hazards in a district’s preparation for retuning in the fall is not practical. Incorporating these suggested protocols into your re-opening plan, however, will better protect you at re-opening and may avoid situations that could easily complicate matters once staff and students do return.

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