

February 15, 2013

To: All Superintendents, Secretary Treasurers, Board Chairs,  
Maintenance & Facilities Supervisors

From: Keith Thomas, Risk Manager

Re: Small Appliances in Classrooms – Is It Worth the Risk?



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A variety of small appliances, such as kettles, toasters, portable heaters, microwaves, etc., has continued to proliferate in classrooms. For school boards who allow this practice, the increased use of such devices (outside curricular requirements) in a school room setting, brings a growing risk exposure to serious injury for students and a potential fire hazard. During a recent school inspection a coffee pot had been left unattended and showed burn marks on the bottom of the glass carafe.

While the benefits of hot meals, drinks and snacks in the comfort of the classroom at first may sound appealing, there have been some avoidable injuries from heating/cooking appliances. Scalding and burn injuries have occurred from hot liquids being spilled on other students while carrying cups to their desks, or by knocking cups off desks, ledges, etc. In one “near miss” incident, students were caught trying to explode a D-cell battery in a microwave oven, narrowly avoiding serious injury. Portable space heaters pose injury hazards, as they can reach high temperatures quickly, causing burns if they are touched while in operation.

These types of hazards would not be present, or these incidents and injuries would not have occurred if heating/cooking appliances were not present in the classrooms where students had access to, or could come into contact with them. It is recommended that, with the exception of classroom facilities designed to support curricular programs (eg., family studies, life skills, etc.), that such appliances be restricted to cafeterias or where proper eating/cooking facilities exist and where there is proper supervision.



Re: Small Appliances in Classrooms – Is It Worth the Risk?

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The following **RISK MANAGEMENT TIPS** apply to all small electronic appliances, including (but not limited to) the following: electric kettles, electric hot plates, microwave ovens, electric fry pans, popcorn makers, coffee makers, space heaters (electric or other), etc.:

1. These devices are not recommended for classroom use as they pose a burn/scalding hazard;
2. Small appliances should only be kept in an area where there is constant adult supervision and where they are non-accessible to students (eg., locked staff room);
3. All appliances should be in good condition (cords, plugs, etc.) and should have either CSA, UL or ULC labels. Unplug appliances when not in use;
4. Small appliances should only be used in areas where there are no students;
5. All refrigerators in classrooms must be on a separate circuit;
6. Space heaters shall only be used on a temporary basis and must be supplied by the Maintenance Department.
7. All kitchen type appliances must be plugged directly into a receptacle (no extension cords or power bars).