

General Housekeeping

Background

One of the leading causes of work-related injuries in schools occurs during routine housekeeping, such as setting up and taking down classrooms, opening and closing windows, and waxing or washing the floors. Many CIRMA-member school districts see a spike in claim reporting and the severity of Workers' Compensation claims during the spring and summer months; often times, these claims are avoidable.

Employee Demographics

Age:	75 year old
Occupation:	Part-time custodian with the school district
Tenure:	Employed by the school district for 13 years
Biology Notes:	Right handed
Medical Notes:	Recently returned to work after having right hip replacement surgery

Incident Description

- Incident occurred in May 2017 on the first floor of a CIRMA-member school district middle school.
- Part of the injured employee's job responsibilities include making sure all doors and windows are shut and locked.
- On the date of the incident, the employee observed a high window that was open and needed to be closed.
- The employee pulled over a nearby Director's chair. A Director's chair is one with a cloth back and seat.
- The employee climbed up on the chair, placing both knees on the seat of the chair. The employee reached up, closed and locked the window.
- While the employee was descending off of the Director's chair, the chair tipped and fell, causing the employee to fall backwards and land to the right with the chair.
- The tipped chair caused the employee to strike the right side of his head on the chair, and he proceeded to fall to the ground onto his right arm, right shoulder, and right hip.
- While still on the ground, the employee called over to a coworker who was within earshot but who could not see the incident. The employee asked the coworker to finish closing and locking the windows while the injured employee was getting up off of the ground.
- The injured employee stayed at work and finished the shift. The injured employee did not notify a supervisor of the fall on the date of the incident.
- The next day, the injured employee returned to work complaining of arm, hip and leg pain (all right side). The injured employee was displaying a noticeable limp and had multiple abrasions on his head, arm, and leg.
- The injured employee reported what had happened the day earlier to his supervisor, who then engaged the school nurse to fill out the necessary work-related injury paperwork, per the school district's protocol. The school nurse immediately instructed the injured employee to seek a medical evaluation.

Damages

The injured employee went to Occupational Health, per the school nurse's instructions. The employee had x-rays of his right shoulder and right hip as well as a CT scan of the head. Subsequently, a bone scan was ordered.

It was determined that the employee experienced a fracture of the right calcar region (right femur); thus, in August 2017, the injured employee underwent aspiration of the right hip. In September 2017, the injured employee underwent removal of the right total hip replacement and replacement of an antibiotic spacer, as a result of his development of MRSA. On the day following the September 2017 surgery, the injured employee experienced a stroke.

CIRMA is 100% responsible for this work-related injury and subsequent diagnoses causally related to the initial work-related injury. All in all, the total direct cost of this claim, including medical expenses, equaled \$160,000.

LESSONS LEARNED

Hazard Identification. “One of the ‘root causes’ of workplace injuries, illnesses, and incidents is the failure to identify or recognize hazards that are present, or that could have been anticipated.”¹ Employers should have accurate and current Job Hazard Assessments completed, indicating risks and mitigation efforts, such as proper equipment, policies, procedures, and staff training.

Regular and Ongoing Training. Ensure that staff is appropriately trained on the equipment and techniques required to perform their duties. In many cases, this is accomplished by regular and ongoing training, rather than a “one and done” training session. For tasks that require a ladder, ensure that staff is trained on ladder safety (*reference OSHA 29 CFR 1910.23*).

Incident Reporting. Failure to report an employee injury promptly can have downstream financial implications and reduce employee morale. Regularly communicate to staff to report Workers’ Compensation claims immediately, even when the employee believes no medical treatment is required.

¹ <https://www.osha.gov/safety-management/hazard-identification>

For more information on this topic, please contact your CIRMA Risk Management Consultant. Visit our training schedule at CIRMA.org for a list of current training programs.