CALIFORNIA SCHOOLS
RISK MANAGEMENT

SAFETY MATTERS

RISK MANAGEMENT NEWSLETTER

IN THIS ISSUE **NOV. 20, 2026**

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WATER INTRUSION: PREVENTION AND RESPONSE

OBJECTIVE Recognize common sources and warning signs of water intrusion, identify preventive measures, and understand how prompt, safe response can protect building occupants, reduce property damage, and minimize disruptions to school and college operations.



Flooding can occur due to heavy rain and severe storms, including those in coastal areas that result in storm surges, rapid melting of heavy snow, tsunamis, hurricanes, tropical cyclones, and even dam failure. Flash floods are a specific type of flooding that are dangerous, sudden, and violent—developing in as little as a few minutes—and can even occur in areas where there is no rainfall.

The National Weather Service (NWS) issues a variety of information statements related to flood events, including the following: Flash Flood Warnings, Flood Warnings, and Flood Advisories, which encourage the public to "take action" upon receipt, and Flash Flood Watches and Flood Watches, which the public is encouraged to "be prepared". Flash Flood Warnings are issued by NWS via the Wireless Emergency Alert system.

If not addressed within the first 48 hours, water and moisture that finds its way through roofs, windows, doors, joints, and foundations can lead to fungal growth compromised indoor air quality, and adverse health effects. Whether the source is internal (plumbing, HVAC) or external (rain, flash flooding), identifying the source and mitigating the effects is critical.

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TYPES OF WATER INTRUSION

Surface Water Intrusion:

- Caused by heavy rain, flooding, or snowmelt. Water can enter through doors, windows, or cracks in the foundation.
- Potential sources include poor drainage, blocked gutters, and lack of proper waterproofing.

Plumbing Failures:

- Burst pipes, broken plumbing fixtures, or faulty water heaters can introduce water into the building. Leaks often go unnoticed until significant damage has already occurred.
- Common leak locations include walls, ceilings, and under floors.

Roof Leaks:

- Roofs can develop leaks from age, storm damage, or poor installation, allowing water to infiltrate ceilings, walls, and insulation.
- Roof vents, flashing, and poorly sealed areas are typical weak spots.

Foundation and Basement Intrusion:

- Water can seep into basements or crawl spaces from external ground moisture, foundation cracks, or insufficient grading around the building's exterior.

PREVENTION AND PREPAREDNESS

At a minimum, a water intrusion program should include the following:

- Assign responsibilities. Identify who receives reports, evaluates conditions, coordinates repairs, and communicates with affected occupants.
- Maintain current contacts. Include facilities, administration, risk management, after-hours responders, and qualified restoration vendors.
- Locate shutoff valves. Ensure authorized personnel know where water shutoff valves are located and how to access them safely.
- Prepare for severe weather. Monitor National Weather Service alerts and review procedures for protecting facilities, relocating occupants, and maintaining essential operations. Before the rainy season, prioritize roof and drainage maintenance and repairs at locations with previous rain-related leaks.
- Train employees to report concerns promptly. Water stains, dripping, damp carpeting, condensation, and musty odors should be reported even when the source is unclear.
- Maintain buildings and equipment. Address recurring leaks and drainage problems rather than relying on repeated temporary repairs.

EXTERIOR INSPECTION

Monthly exterior inspections should include:

- Cleaning out roof drains and gutters
- Maintain proper sealants on roof flashings and penetrations
- Check for evidence of ponding on the roof (after a storm)
- Ensure proper drainage exists around the building so water flows away from the structure
- Keep weep holes free of debris and working properly
- Install or repair door gaskets or sweeps
- Ensure weather stripping is in good condition, with no cracks or separation
- Check that doors and windows close properly

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INTERIOR INSPECTION

Include these in your interior inspections:

- Look for signs of water staining on ceilings and walls
- Watch for condensation and wet spots for leaks
- Ensure proper drainage of HVAC equipment
- Maintain low indoor humidity (below 60% relative humidity)
- Check for musty odors
- Do not delay in repairing plumbing leaks or having the HVAC system inspected

Unless the water damage occurs from a catastrophic event, the source may not be as obvious or easy to locate. By taking preventative measures and developing a plan for responding to moisture intrusion, you can help reduce the potential for expensive mold remediation, impacts to school operations, and workers' compensation claims.

REMEDIATION CONSIDERATIONS

1. Immediate Actions:
    - Identify the Source and Shut Off Water Supply: Locate and assess the cause of water intrusion. Ensure that any external water entry points are sealed temporarily to prevent further ingress.
    - Remove Water Quickly: Use pumps, wet vacuums, or mops to remove standing water. The quicker the water is removed, the less damage is likely to occur.
2. Dry Out the Area:
    - Ventilation: Open windows and use fans or dehumidifiers to help dry out affected areas. Moisture removal should begin as soon as possible to prevent mold and mildew growth.
3. Sanitization and Disinfection:
    a. Water intrusion often carries dirt, debris, and contaminants. Thorough cleaning and disinfection should be done to prevent long-term health hazards like mold and bacterial growth.
4. Monitor for Fungal Growth:
    - Fungal growth can begin within 24-48 hours of water intrusion. If the affected area is large, consider engaging a professional remediation team.

RESOURCES

- PRISM Flood Prepartion Resources
- EPA Mold Remediation in Schools and Buildings
- EPA Mold and Water Damage Guidelines PDF
- Water Intrusion and Flood Control Plan Sample
- FEMA Disaster App

This California Schools JPA Safety Matters is intended for general informational purposes and is not exhaustive. The information and recommended practices provided should not be construed as legal advice. Readers are encouraged to consult legal counsel or their insurance providers for guidance specific to their circumstances. Images generated using artificial intelligence (AI) for illustrative purposes only.



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SIGN-IN SHEET

WATER INTRUSION: PREVENTION AND RESPONSE

Facilitator: _____ Facilitator's Signature: _____

Date: _____ Organization: _____ Department: _____

Participants:

Name: _____ Signature: _____

Name: _____ Signature: _____

Name: _____ Signature: _____

Name: _____ Signature: _____

Name: _____ Signature: _____

Name: _____ Signature: _____

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