



## CLASSROOM/OFFICE SAFETY

### **Appliances in the Classroom**

*Source: Keenan& Associates*

The subject of appliances in the classroom continues to be an important issue for school districts and community colleges. At the start of a new school year, we like to provide you with safety tips and resources to help protect your schools.

Staff often wish to have appliances in the classroom/offices, usually for their own personal use and convenience. A small refrigerator and/or hot plate are the appliances most often brought into the classroom. Refrigerators are desired to store food and hot plates to heat food.

Any appliance, especially one designed to heat material, such as a hot plate or coffee maker, has both liability and property risks.

From a liability standpoint, an employee/student could suffer a scald or burn injury from either the hot appliance or from the heated material. Additionally, the appliance could malfunction or short out and result in an electrical shock to a student. From a property loss standpoint, the appliance could overheat, be inadvertently left on or unattended, and cause a fire in the classroom. Should a fire occur during non-school hours, the fire loss could be significant (there has been such a loss).

Most districts either strongly discourage or prohibit (with exceptions) having food in the classroom. The purpose is to help control the potential for spillage, thus creating both slip and fall risks and extra custodial attention for cleanup, and to mitigate possible rodent and insect problems that may result from having stored or spilled food. Allowing an appliance for personal convenience negates these desired goals.

Consider the following:

- All appliances should be in good working condition (cords, plugs, etc.) and should have either CSA, UL or ULC labels.
- Refrigerators must be used for their intended purpose. Non-food items are not to be stored with food items; for example, a refrigerator used for chemical storage in a science storeroom cannot be used to store food. Signage to that fact should be prominently displayed on the refrigerator.
- Appliances must be plugged directly into the wall without the use of an extension cord.
- In locations where microwave ovens are used, signs must be posted indicating that a microwave oven may be in use.
- 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).
- Always maintain at least 36" of clearance between the appliance and any combustible products such as wood or paper.
- Unplug appliances when not in use. This is important during the weekends and vacation times when no

one is present in the school.

- Remove appliance(s) from classroom after authorized use time period has expired.

The best and safest option is to develop a policy that bans the use of personal appliances in your school. If it is an essential part of the curriculum, district protocols should be followed to reduce liability and property loss risks.

This information on the Risk Advisor website is intended to assist Keenan clients in identifying and reducing certain loss exposures. It is not possible for us to identify all potential sources of liability or to offer a fail-safe mechanism for dealing with them. Keenan offers no guarantee that clients will recognize any financial savings or improved loss experience as a result of the information and suggestions presented here.

Date Posted: 11/11/22

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