



Office of Facilities Planning Newsletter #44 – October 2003

Utility Outage:

As a result of our State's recent experience with hurricane/tropical storm Isabel, some localized areas were left without electric power from their utility companies. It was of concern to us that some districts did not cancel or dismiss school when they lost electric power. We also learned of a school that experienced a water main break. We feel this school also should have closed when water was not restored within the first hour.

Operating a school building without electricity or water violates Commissioner's Regulation 155.7, "Health and Safety in Existing Educational Facilities". A few of the items that concerned us most involved the mechanical systems being inoperative, resulting in inadequate ventilation. The sanitation systems (toilet rooms) were not useable because there were no lights (electric) or water (water main break). Classrooms did not have the lights on and the corridors were dark after the emergency lights got weak (after 90 minutes). Sprinkler systems can not function without water. It is also possible that the smoke and fire control systems, including the fire alarm system, may have become inoperative depending on how well their batteries are maintained. These are all required systems that must be fully operable for the safety and health of the students and staff.

If the previously mentioned systems are inoperative, it definitely poses a threat to the students, staff, and school property. Whereas it is conceivable to provide assistance to overcome some safety systems and lighting requirements, it becomes difficult to teach with a lack of lighting and provide personal assistance to each student for all their needs. While fresh potable water can be brought in for cooking and drinking, sanitary systems must also be maintained for the use of students and staff. When the toilets cannot be flushed it is time to dismiss.

We hope all districts will keep this in mind and report instances of school closings for power outages to SED through the District Superintendent as required by 155.17(h) of the Commissioner's Regulations for the School Emergency Management Plan.

Athletic Competition and Sports Facility Design:

Recently we discovered that a few districts were upset with the sports facilities that have been designed for them. As we investigated, we found that some facilities have not been designed to comply with the New York State Public High School Athletic Association (NYSPHSAA) standards. With the exception of Health and Labor Department Code requirements that apply in only a few instances, neither SED nor the building codes have any requirements for the competition rooms, fields, and playgrounds. In the instance that the playing field is exterior, we participate in the SEQRA process and provide comments regarding environmental impacts as necessary. We do not review the adequacy of sports field design beyond code compliance. For interior spaces we follow the code requirements, but that does not include the playing surfaces, dimensions, and parameters.

We do recommend that the playing fields follow the requirements of the NYSPHSAA, a member of the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS). It is more than likely that every school follows the requirements for rules set by NFHS. Many of the "rule books" have requirements for setting up playing fields, courts, etc. This includes football, basketball, volleyball, swimming, diving, baseball, soccer, field hockey, ice hockey, wrestling, lacrosse, and others. For example, when there is a health code that applies to the depth of a

pool, that is a minimum standard. When the corresponding NFHS rules require the depth to be deeper, the pool must be deeper to comply with athletic competition requirements.

For playgrounds we recommend that everyone follow the Handbook for Public Playground Safety by the US Consumer Product Safety Commission.

The web sites for both of these organizations are:

National Federation of High School Athletic Associations <http://www.nfhs.org>.

Consumer Product Safety Commission www.cpsc.gov.

Reminder - Minimum Temperature in Schools:

We have had so many calls regarding this subject over the past month that it is worth the time to add this reminder. The minimum temperature in occupied buildings is **65 degrees** and it must be maintained from **September 15th through May 31st**. This is a requirement of the Property Maintenance Code of New York State, Section 602.4. Any previous references to not providing heat until October 15th are no longer acceptable. This may seem to be in the past, but buildings with ongoing construction projects must also meet this requirement for occupied portions of their buildings.

An Index of our Newsletters is available on our web site at <https://www.p12.nysed.gov/facplan/NewsLetters.htm>.

If you would like to have this Newsletter sent directly to you by e-mail, please send your e-mail address to Joe Levy at jlevy@mail.nysed.gov

Please continue to send in your comments and requests. If you have a subject you would like addressed, feedback on the material you read, input or general comments we are happy to hear from you.