

SPRING CLEANING

Background: After a(nother!) particularly brutal winter, April showers will bring more than May flowers. For the NJPHA-JIF, May is the month in which we have most frequently experienced resident fires. Employees are subject hazards during spring clean-ups, and our premises need to have the ravages of winter removed.

For Employees

- Many spring-cleaning chores such as cleaning gutters and trimming trees involve the use of a **ladder**. Knowing how to properly set up and use a ladder is an important first step in reducing the chance of a fall or other ladder-related accident. When using a ladder, stand at or below the highest safe standing level. For a stepladder, the safe standing level is the second rung from the top, and for an extension ladder, it's the fourth rung from the top. Make sure the rungs are dry and the ladder is securely positioned on a flat surface. Set up a regular inspection of ladders and make sure it is carried out before using.
- **Strains** continue to be the NJPHA-JIF's highest source of claim frequency and loss costs in workers' compensation. Proper lifting techniques should be part of any spring cleaning project. Don't attempt to move an object without thinking about where it's being moved to and evaluating whether you can lift that amount of weight safely. Encourage employees to engage in some basic stretching before lifting. Keep your back upright and bend at the knees while tightening the stomach muscles as you lift with your leg muscles. When putting an item down in a location that is below chest height, bend your knees again and lower the item carefully, making sure your toes and fingers aren't in a position to get crushed. Get help as needed with oversized trash bags and other waste containers. Rolling bags into a wheelbarrow is a simple way of reducing the exposure to back injuries.
- Make sure your **Safety Data Sheet** binder is up to date, and then review the precautions for cleaning materials with staff: Follow product label safety recommendations, like wearing gloves and masks, when using harsh products. Do not mix cleaning products together; their contents could react with dangerous results. This is especially important when using cleaning products that contain chlorine or ammonia. Keep several windows open at all times, or if you are working in a room without windows, leave the door wide open and use a fan inside to get the air circulating.
- Latex paints are a big improvement over oil-based paints, but as they dry can give off volatile organic compounds, such as petroleum distillates, that may cause headaches, nausea, or dizziness. Paint removers can contain toluene, which can affect mental processes and behavior, or methylene chloride, which if inhaled can lead to carbon monoxide poisoning.

For Property

- Test all your smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors to ensure they are working. Replace the backup batteries (tying this task to Daylight Savings/Standard Time is a good practice). Most smoke alarms also need "spring cleaning" maintenance - check your manual.
- Check playground equipment – make sure equipment is structurally sound, and that safety surfacing is adequate in depth. Lack of sufficient surface depth is the most frequently observed deficiency at NJPHA-JIF playgrounds. Replenish surface material as needed.

- Trips and falls continue to be our most frequent liability claim source. Check sidewalks and parking lots for spalling and potholes. Winter freezing and warm-ups have caused havoc on surfacing. Make cold patch repairs to major potholes until repairs that are more permanent can be made.
- Examine roofs and flashing that may have been damaged by ice or snow. That damage can easily translate into water damage as the Spring rains materialize. Remember that by the time you read this, the predictions will be issued for the next hurricane season. There is a small window of opportunity to take care of these issues.

For Residents

- Encourage Spring-cleaning with your residents: if done properly, Spring-cleaning can also dramatically improve safety inside of their residences. Spend the time to reduce clutter. Encourage cleanup days and consider recycling days to get rid of paper goods or old electronics. While clutter does not *start* fires, it can become the fuel for a fire, make fires more difficult for the Fire Department to extinguish, and may make it more difficult to escape when a fire breaks out.
- Encourage residents to reduce or eliminate hazardous chemicals. Cleaners, paint and other common household chemicals can fuel a fire and are often hazardous to health. Work with your local municipality to sponsor a clean-up day, where hazardous chemicals can be disposed of in accordance with local requirements.

For further assistance on this matter or other safety and risk control issues, contact your risk management consultant or Jim Rhoads, NJPHA-JIF safety consultant (610-937-2694).

IMPORTANT NOTICE - *The information and suggestions presented by PMA Companies in this risk control technical guide are for your consideration in your loss prevention efforts. They are not intended to be complete or definitive in identifying all hazards associated with your business, preventing workplace accidents, or complying with any safety related or other laws or regulations. You are encouraged to alter the information and suggestions to fit the specific hazards of your business and to have your legal counsel review all of your plans and company policies.*