



# SCHOOLNET!

*A Community Safety Publication Serving Tacoma and Pierce County*



TACOMA-PIERCE COUNTY  
HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Spring, 1999

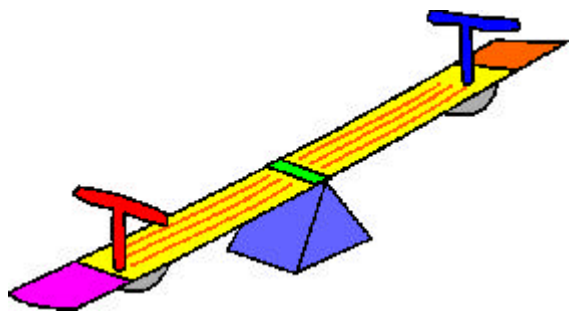
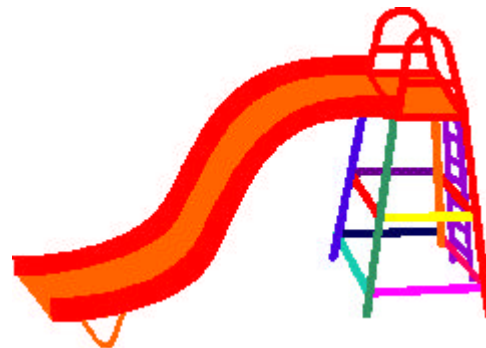
## For Your Information

### PLAYGROUND RELATED INJURIES



Statistics show that injury to students on school playgrounds and recreation areas is a significant problem. However, many injuries could have been prevented by identifying and correcting conditions prior to students use. Some examples include entrapment hazards, play equipment or structures having sharp or pointed objects and poorly maintained structures such as swing sets and climbing bars.

Each year there are approximately 200,000 preschool and elementary-aged children who receive emergency medical care in the U.S. from injuries that occurred on playground equipment. This means that a child requires medical attention approximately every 2 1/2 minutes. Public playground injuries, which include school playgrounds, account for approximately 70% of all playground equipment injuries. Falling to the surface is the number one contributing factor in playground injuries.



Approximately 9 to 17 children die each year in playground equipment-related accidents. Of these deaths, strangulation accounts for 47%, while falls account to another 31%. Playground injury is the leading cause of injury to students ages 5 to 14 in the school environment. The estimated cost of playground injuries to children under age 15 was \$1 billion in 1992. (Source: U.S. Consumer Product

Safety Commission's National Electronic Injury Surveillance System, 1990-1994.)

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## TWO SIMPLE PLAYGROUND SAFETY SUGGESTIONS



Discourage children from wearing clothing with neck strings and hoods when using playground equipment. This can reduce the risk of accidental strangulation.

Check the playground surface material depth twice each year. Pea gravel can "concrete" or solidify over time so that the effective depth of surface material is greatly reduced. Rototilling solidified pea gravel can restore depth and cushioning ability.

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## HEALTH AND SAFETY ASSESSMENT VISITS

Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department conducts health and safety assessment visits without charge to assist your school staff in identifying and correcting health or safety hazards and to make the educational environment a safe and hazard-free zone. Our School Safety Specialist will visit your school, conduct a site evaluation, and provide your staff with recommendations to improve areas relating to health and safety.



Areas that are prone to having a variety of health and safety hazards include the playground, gymnasium, classrooms, hallways, science and home economics rooms, multipurpose rooms, mechanical rooms, and surrounding areas adjacent to the school property.

At the conclusion of each visit, the School Safety Specialist can advise your staff about the results of the site visit and make recommendations to improve safety. Our goal is to work directly with your staff to make your school as safe as possible.

### REQUESTING A SITE VISIT:

If you would like one of our staff to visit your school, please call us at **(253) 798-6460** to arrange a time. Our School Safety Specialist will visit your school and conduct the assessment with your designated staff member and leave a copy of the evaluation with him or her.

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## TOXIC MOLDS IN SCHOOLS

An increasing amount of reports relating to the presence of mold in schools in the U.S. have prompted health warnings about the potential dangers of a type of mold called *Stachybotrys Chartarum* (SC), also known as *Stachybotrys Atra*.

Molds (fungi) are found everywhere both indoors and out. SC is one of the molds that is associated with health effects in people, and has been reported in schools around the country. Schools in the Pacific Northwest, in particular, may provide ideal growth conditions for *Stachybotrys*. SC thrives in wet conditions and requires a substrate containing cellulose. Drywall, ceiling tiles, wood, and paper are examples of substrates containing cellulose. SC will not grow on concrete, ceramic or stone tiles, linoleum, glass or metal. SC is a greenish-black mold often confused with other, nontoxic molds. SC, however, is not a common mold found in buildings.



Typically, indoor air levels of SC are relatively low and therefore not generally hazardous to health. At higher levels though, SC can cause asthma attacks, respiratory allergies and skin rashes. Care should be taken to prevent skin contact with *Stachybotrys*.

In rare instances, the toxins may also cause young children, infants and the immuno-compromised to experience chest congestion, nose bleeds, bleeding of the lungs and even death. Therefore, it is imperative that the breathing of SC spores and particles be avoided.

SC growth may indicate a moisture problem, leak, or broken pipe. The moisture problem must be corrected if cleanup activities are to be effective. Short of removing the medium and conditions for mold growth, SC should be cleaned as soon as possible.

#### **CLEANUP STEPS FOR SC:**

1. Use breathing protection when cleaning *Stachybotrys* or suspected *Stachybotrys*.
2. Use a common household bleach and water mix (1 part bleach to 10 parts water) to clean it. Apply the bleach water to the surface with a sponge, and let it stand 15 minutes.
3. Then clean the surface with soapy water, rinse, and thoroughly dry the surface.
4. Dispose of any sponges and rags used to clean the mold.

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**SCHOOL ADVISORY BOARD**

The mission of the SAB is to assist the Health Department on industry issues that affect the public health and safety in the school environment, develop operational policies and procedures, promote positive communication between schools and the Health Department, formulate changes in financial policies, and develop a comprehensive strategic plan.



Membership is open to all administrative, teaching, and support staff for all Pierce County schools, both public and private.

The Board meets four times a year. The 1998-99 Board met in November for a strategic planning session to outline activities for 1999; the next meeting is scheduled for May 12, 1999.

For more information about the Board or membership, please contact David DeLong at **798-6499**.

## **ABOUT THIS NEWSLETTER**

The newsletter "SCHOOLNET" is published quarterly and is provided to all school staff in Pierce County. The purpose of the newsletter is to establish a forum to share ideas, initiatives, legislative and administrative changes, and health and safety issues impacting our local schools. Articles or inquiries should be submitted to: TPCHD School Program, 3629 South D Street, MS012, Tacoma, Washington, 98408. This Website in an Internet version of the printed newsletter.

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