



Massachusetts  
Department  
of  
ENVIRONMENTAL  
PROTECTION

## Municipal Compliance Fact Sheet

# Environmental Compliance in Public Schools

### What You Should Know About This Issue:

Environmental, health, and safety problems in schools affect students, teachers and staff, and can hinder education. Children between the ages of six and 18 spend more of their waking hours at school than they do anywhere else. Common environmental hazards can include:

- Improperly stored cleaning chemicals and shop wastes.
- Preventable air pollution exposures.
- Asbestos in boiler rooms and building insulation.
- Lead in playground soil, and old water lines.
- Mercury in nurses' offices and science labs.

MassDEP regulates these hazards to protect the health and safety of students, teachers, staff and visitors. When the Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) finds violations of its regulations, enforcement actions include cleanup and may include financial penalties.

### Examples of Municipal Facilities & Activities Involved:

- Facility cleaning and maintenance.
- Chemical management, storage, recycling and disposal.
- School furnaces, boilers, emergency generators and incinerators.
- Heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems.
- Water distribution pipes and drinking fountains.
- Classrooms, laboratories, and vocational shops.
- Playgrounds and athletic fields.
- Student transportation.

### Common Compliance Issues:

#### *Chemical & Hazardous Waste Management*

- Know your status for hazardous wastes generated by labs, vocational shops, and facility cleaning and maintenance. This determines how much waste can be accumulated at one time and how quickly it must be shipped off-site for recycling or disposal. Register your generator status with MassDEP.
- Label hazardous waste and waste oil storage containers with the names of materials they hold, the hazards they present (e.g., corrosive, flammable) *and* the dates when accumulation began in each container.
- Ensure that all waste containers are suited to their contents, are in good condition, and are kept tightly closed except briefly while in use. Store on impervious surfaces in designated and marked storage areas, with secondary containment areas to guard against leaks or spills.

#### *Air Pollution*

- Obtain MassDEP approvals for school boilers, furnaces, emergency generators and incinerators. Specific requirements depend on when the units were installed, their fuel input capacity, and the type of fuel they burn. If the *combined* rating of all units is 10 million BTU per hour or more, they must be registered periodically with MassDEP.
- Turn off vehicle engines when not actively transporting students. Limit vehicle idling to less than five minutes (except when conducting safety checks, servicing vehicles, delivering refrigerated goods, and operating accessories such as power lifts).



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### *Asbestos, Lead, Mercury & Other Contaminants*

- Identify all asbestos-containing building materials in your facility. Develop plans to manage the asbestos, notify parents and staff that the plan is available, train school maintenance and custodial workers, and deal with dangerous asbestos in a timely way. Notify MassDEP of any asbestos abatement or removal project 10 business days before it starts, and ensure that all work complies with state rules.
- Make sure that the school's water outlets (including faucets and drinking fountains) have been evaluated for lead in the water or plumbing. Implement a corrective action plan, if needed.
- If soil around a school is found to have contamination at concentrations higher than MassDEP levels, notify the agency and assess the contaminated area to determine whether cleanup is required to eliminate a significant risk of harm to health or the environment.
- Do not purchase elemental mercury or products containing mercury for classroom use.

### *Emergencies & Spills*

- Notify the local fire department and MassDEP within two hours of discovering a chemical spill or an imminent threat to the health or safety of students and staff.

### **Environmental Stewardship Tips:**

- Assess your school's environmental compliance and identify areas needing improvement: use the Healthy Schools Checklist.
- Develop an Environmental Management System to improve regulatory compliance, operate more efficiently, and save money.
- Add pollution controls to your diesel school buses, to prevent the emission of harmful particles in your community's air.
- Use environmentally preferable cleaning solutions and other products purchased through Massachusetts Statewide Contracts for Healthier Schools.
- Clean out expired and unneeded chemicals and products that contain mercury. Control chemical purchases to prevent building hazardous stockpiles.

### **Technical Assistance, Outreach, Grants, and Loans:**

- MassDEP grants for controlling air emissions from diesel school buses: check [www.mass.gov/dep](http://www.mass.gov/dep) starting in Fall 2007 for information and an application.
- MassDEP grants and technical assistance for chemical cleanouts: [www.mass.gov/dep/service/compliance/schlchem.htm](http://www.mass.gov/dep/service/compliance/schlchem.htm)
- Funds and assistance for cleaning out mercury products Northeast Waste Management Officials Association (NEWMOA) or your solid waste combustion facility ([www.newmoa.org/mercury](http://www.newmoa.org/mercury))
- Design a "safe chemicals purchase and use" policy: The Massachusetts Office of Technical Assistance (OTA) [www.mass.gov/envir/ota/programs/school\\_mentoring.htm](http://www.mass.gov/envir/ota/programs/school_mentoring.htm)

### **Contact MassDEP for More Information:**

- MassDEP Schools webpage: [www.mass.gov/dep/service/schools.htm](http://www.mass.gov/dep/service/schools.htm)
- MassDEP Kids & Teachers webpage: [www.mass.gov/dep/recycle/reduce/kidsteac.htm#kids](http://www.mass.gov/dep/recycle/reduce/kidsteac.htm#kids)
- MassDEP regional office staff can answer your environmental compliance questions: [www.mass.gov/dep/about/region/findyour.htm](http://www.mass.gov/dep/about/region/findyour.htm)
- Call the MassDEP 24-Hour Emergency Response Line (toll-free) at 888-304-1133 to report an oil or hazardous chemical release.

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