

# HEALTH & SAFETY

A NEWSLETTER FOR NYSUT'S HEALTH AND SAFETY LEADERS

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## Legislative victories and work ahead at session's end

**N**YSUT health and safety activists' ongoing advocacy has paid off with the passage of several important health and safety bills.

Passed by both houses, these bills were delivered to the governor for signing: **A4025/S1643** prohibits smoking at playgrounds; **A6647/S3528A** prohibits U-turns in school zones during posted school hours; **A2126A/S595A** allows students and camp attendees to use and carry sunscreen in school with written parental permission; **A7443A/S5489A** requires a study about the cost of installing hard-wired carbon monoxide detectors in schools; and **S4881A/A7324**, permits licensed pharmacists and certified nurse practitioners to administer meningitis vaccines.

These are important gains, however, continued advocacy is critically needed for three key bills which failed to get passed as the 2012-13 legislative session ended.

### **School Workplace Violence**

**Prevention (A6902/S1936A):** This would have included public schools in the law requiring public employers to implement programs to prevent workplace violence. It did not get past either labor committee. All other public employees in New York have been protected since 2006.

**Safe Patient Handling (A2180B/S1123B):** This bill would have established a statewide safe patient handling policy for New York's health care facilities and created a statewide safe patient handling work group. It passed the Assembly but failed in the Senate, where it stayed in the Rules Committee.

**Child Safe Products Act (A6328/S4614):** Passage would have meant creation of a list of chemicals of concern and banning of certain toxic chemicals in products for young children. The bill passed the Assembly but Senate co-leaders Dean Skelos and Jeff



**Kathleen M. Donahue**  
NYSUT Vice President

Klein failed to bring the bill to a floor vote despite having 36 Senate sponsors.

These bills will be reintroduced in the next legislative session.

"NYSUT leaders and health and safety activists, your advocacy will be a critical component in getting these bills passed," said NYSUT Vice President Kathleen Donahue. "We need you to speak out on these key issues. We must make our voices heard to ensure important protections like these get passed in the 2013-14 legislative session."

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For more, see [www.nysut.org](http://www.nysut.org).

# Working safely in **HIGH HEAT** environments

**M**any NYSUT members work outside during the summer, or inside without air conditioning. Members' children may also have summer jobs that expose them to excessive temperatures.

Working in hot environments puts employees at serious health risk. Every year, thousands of employees become sick or die due to heat illness. People who are overweight, over 65, or have heart conditions or high blood pres-

sure are more susceptible to heat stress.

Smart employers will help employees acclimate to warmer weather, plan work schedules to reduce risk, and provide shelter, breaks and water so workers don't suffer from heat-related illnesses.

It's important to recognize the signs of heat stress. It's even more important to prevent heat-related illness.

## Heat-related illnesses

Types of heat-related illness and their symptoms:

- **Heat exhaustion:** the body's response to excessive loss of water and salt. Symptoms include rapid heartbeat, cramps, heavy sweating, extreme fatigue, nausea and irritability.
- **Heat stroke:** the body becomes unable to control its temperature — can cause death or permanent disability. Symptoms include high body temperature, confusion, loss of coordination, hot dry skin or heavy sweating, throbbing headache and seizures.

Both the Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) and the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) highlight the importance of cooling down external and internal environments. If heat stress symptoms occur, stop physical activity and relax in a cool place. Drink plenty



of water and sports drinks to replace electrolytes lost during excessive sweating, and use cool compresses to decrease temperature. If you suspect heat stroke, call 911.

## Preventing heat-related illnesses

Our internal temperature rises when we're exposed to high temperatures. Combining high temperatures or high humidity with strenuous activity increases the chance of heat-related illness.

OSHA recommends the following to avoid heat-related illnesses:

- Schedule heavy work during the coolest parts of the day.
- When doing heavier work in high heat and humidity, take frequent breaks in the shade or a cool area.
- Keep hydrated. Drink water frequently enough so that you never become thirsty.
- Be aware that protective clothing

## HEALTH & SAFETY

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# Increasing fresh air in classrooms decreases absences

Other benefits noted include cost savings for districts

**A**ccording to an article on the Berkley Lab News Center website, a recent study finds correlation between higher illness absences and lower ventilation rates in California elementary schools.

The study by scientists at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory (Berkeley Lab) will validate your belief that opening windows for fresh air might be good for you. Researchers analyzed vast data on ventilation rates collected over two years from more than 150 classrooms in California. It is the largest U.S. study to date to look at ventilation rates in classrooms.

They found that “bringing classroom ventilation rates up to the state-mandated standard could reduce student absences due to sickness by approximately 3.4 percent.”

In California a 3.4 percent attendance improvement would give California school districts an extra \$33 million annually in attendance-linked funding. Families would also save an estimated \$80 million in caregiver costs from having a sick child at home. Total associated energy costs would increase by just \$4 million annually. “Our overall findings suggest that, if you increased ventilation rates of classrooms up to the state standard, or even above it, you would get net benefits to schools, to families, to everybody, at very low cost,” said Berkeley Lab scientist Mark Mendell. “It’s really a win-win situation.”

California building codes require schools to provide a ventilation rate of about 15 cubic feet per minute per person. It is also the standard for offices and retail stores. This is also the ventilation requirement for new construction in New York. Ventilation

rate measures how much outside air is brought indoors, whether through natural ventilation (i.e., opening windows) or mechanical ventilation.

Each classroom’s data on daily absences due to illness was provided by the districts. Researchers calculated ventilation rates by measuring carbon dioxide levels indoors and estimated levels outdoors.

The overall finding from all three districts: for every additional 1 liter/second/person of ventilation provided to a classroom, illness absence dropped by 1.6 percent, with the benefit continuing at least up to 15 liters/second/person, more than double the state standard. That 1.6 percent fewer absences is important considering the number of people involved.

While not included in the study, researchers noted other benefits, like reduced costs connected to sick leave for teachers and staff and reduced health care costs for students. In most parts of California, replacing ventilation equipment would probably not be necessary to increase the ventilation rates.

Although researchers don’t know how or why poor ventilation results in more illness absences, they found the correlation between ventilation rates and illness absence was “. . . consistent across school districts, climate zones and ventilation types.”

Carl Thurnau, director of facilities in the New York State Education Department’s Office of Facilities

Planning said: “This study supports the beliefs of the Office of Facilities Planning that increasing ventilation rates supports healthy and high-performing school facilities. That will lead to better indoor air quality, which in turn will promote lower absenteeism of both students and staff.”

## Working safely in HIGH HEAT

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or personal protective equipment may increase the risk of heat-related illnesses.

- Monitor yourself and your coworkers for signs or symptoms of heat illnesses.
- Wear light-colored, loose-fitting, breathable clothing such as cotton and avoid non-breathable synthetic clothing.

There are good Web resources for more information about heat-related illnesses and how to avoid them.

- [www.osha.gov/SLTC/heatillness/index.html](http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/heatillness/index.html);
- [www.redcross.org/images/MEDIA\\_CustomProductCatalog/m4340158\\_HeatWave.pdf](http://www.redcross.org/images/MEDIA_CustomProductCatalog/m4340158_HeatWave.pdf);
- and
- [www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/heatstress](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/heatstress).



## Wireless Emergency Alerts offer **LIFESAVING** information

**R**eal-time Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEAs) allow you to receive important lifesaving alerts no matter where you are; at home, school, or work.

WEAs send free informational text messages to WEA-enabled cell phones within range of an imminent and dangerous local situation, severe weather event or AMBER emergency. Many

communities also offer emergency alert notifications through their own systems. Visit [www.Ready.gov/alerts](http://www.Ready.gov/alerts) for more information on WEA Alerts.

To find out if your mobile device is capable of receiving WEA alerts, visit [www.ctia.org/wea](http://www.ctia.org/wea) or contact your mobile device carrier.



## NIOSH launches ladder safety mobile app



**T**he National Institute for Occupational Safety & Health (NIOSH) released a new free application (app) for mobile phone devices aimed at improving extension ladder safety. Falls from ladders are an important source of preventable injuries. Misjudging the ladder angle is an important risk factor for a fall. If the ladder is set too steeply, it is more likely to fall back or slide away during use, and if it is set too shallow, the

bottom can slide out.

The NIOSH Ladder Safety phone app has an angle of inclination indicator making it easy to set an extension ladder at the proper angle of 75.5 degrees.

The app allows most cell phones to give a visual and audible signal when the ladder angle is correctly set. The ladder safety app also has other good information about ladder safety, i.e., ladder selection, inspection, accessorizing and use.

**The app is available through the niosh website**

■ [www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/falls](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/falls)

**Android or iPhone users can find the app at**

- <https://itunes.apple.com/WebObjects/MZStore.woa/wa/viewSoftware?id=658633912&mt=8> or
- <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=gov.cdc.niosh.dsr.ladder-safety>

■ **FEMA funds 'Disaster Hero'** online video game for PC and Mac Disaster Hero is a free online game designed to teach students in grades 1-8, educators, and parents and caregivers how to prepare for disasters. Players are encouraged to learn about the types of disasters that might occur in their geographic region or state. The most common disasters – earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, and tornadoes – are used to teach users how to prepare for, and what to do during and after an emergency event.

Downloadable learning activities and checklists targeted to educators and parents are also available on the website. Visit [www.disasterhero.com](http://www.disasterhero.com) to play.



## Stay safe this summer!

The American Public Health Association's Get Ready campaign has information to keep you safe from summer disasters and dangers. The page includes information on heat waves, hurricanes, power outages, tornadoes, mosquitoes and ticks. Visit [www.getreadyforflu.org/SummerSafe.htm](http://www.getreadyforflu.org/SummerSafe.htm) to find it.