

Further Reading: The Importance of Occupational Health and Safety

The school hosts pupils and teachers, both of whom spend a large part of their day in the school environment. The school environment must be a healthy and safe place to be for all.

According to the Teaching Service Commission Act, the TSC is responsible for the wellbeing of teachers.

An important part of wellbeing is to ensure existing Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) regulations are appropriately adopted, health and safety measures are implemented in the work environment, and teachers take care of their own health and safety to enable them to thrive in their jobs and perform to a high standard.

Health and safety hazards in the school environment may include:

- Lack of hygiene and WASH facilities
- Chalk dust from using blackboards
- Bad electricity wiring and installations
- Lack of fire extinguishers and accessible fire-escapes
- Lack of first aid kit and sick bay for accidents or health emergencies
- Lack of health facilities
- Poor disposal of refuse
- Lack of canteen facilities – food in the open
- Unsafe playing grounds
- Lack of fencing to prevent intrusion, including dangerous animals such as snakes and scorpions.
- Mosquito infestations (even small pools of water are a breeding ground)
- Toxic materials stored incorrectly or used without protective precautions
- Unsafe building structures and arrangements
- Sitting and standing positions causing back and shoulder tension
- Overcrowded and noisy classrooms
- Bad ventilation
- Lack of ramps, toilet facilities and other arrangements for disabled teachers and pupils
- Air and other forms of pollution, including smoke from cars and cigarettes
- Poor accessibility and lack of zebra crossings
- Slippery floors.

Lawmakers, those responsible for school construction and facilities, school inspectors, supervisors, education and school boards and committees, school leaders and the teachers all have a role to play in ensuring health and safety in schools for both teachers and pupils. It is a cross-cutting area between HR represented by the TSC and TSC-DOs and other professional disciplines, such as school supervision and quality assessment represented by the MBSSE and DEOs.

It is therefore important for school authorities at all levels to work together on OHS and have regular and clear systems in place for checks and monitoring. Besides the risk of personal costs of inadequate health and safety precautions, there are serious legal implications in case of accidents and work-related health issues.

Who is responsible

Department of Teacher-Employer Relations, TSC:

- oversees OHS policy and regulations, labour laws and other legal OHS instruments applying to teachers and ensures they are formulated, available, updated and implemented.

The MBSSE:

- the MBSSE Inspectorate and DEO-DD, inspectors and supervisors ensure OHS regulations and standards are adhered to in all schools across the country and report back on deficiencies.

Schools, school leaders, SMC/BoG and other local players:

- ensure OHS regulations and standards are adequate and adhered to on a daily basis, and report to the DEO/TSC-DO immediately if this is not the case. They should also record cases in their regular school reports.

Other institutions with responsibilities of Occupational Health & Safety include:

- SLTU
 - SL Labour Congress
 - Ministry of Labour
 - Ministry of Health and Sanitation
 - Ministry of Social Welfare (gender and children affairs)
 - Teachers' associations
 - Municipal and Local Councils
 - Standards Bureau
 - Consumer Protection Agency.
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