



The Evolution of Risk and Risk Management in the Education Sector

A look at how the education industry has evolved over the years.

With the growth and expansion of university and college campuses came increased risk across all disciplines.

As we look back in time, it is fascinating to see how school facilities and operations in the education industry have changed, grown, and evolved. With the growth and expansion of university and college campuses came increased risk across all disciplines, including health, safety and environment (HSE).

Risks in schools over 100 years ago

In the 1800's, the education industry looked very different than it does today. A typical schoolhouse consisted of one room with one teacher and a mix of students ranging in age. Rural schools were near farms or small towns where families lived and worked. Students attended elementary school up to grade 8. Anyone wanting to pursue higher education could attend school in a larger town or city, which was costly. Typically, children from wealthier families had the privilege to go to these schools.

Throughout North America, schools were simple buildings that reflected what residents could afford and construct themselves. Schools were small rectangular structures made of wood, brick, or stone, consisting of a classroom and cloakroom or closet for storage.

Most schools did not have electricity or indoor plumbing. Wood stoves heated the room, and light in schools came through the windows and from a few lanterns situated throughout. Wood to heat the school was supplied by parents, based on expectations from the school district. Kids walked to school carrying a log or two to help keep the school heated during the winter months.

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Contagious diseases have been a risk in schools for years.

Due to unsanitary conditions, contracting a contagious disease such as diphtheria or typhoid was high.

The schoolhouse's furnishings were minimal; teachers had a desk, some books and maps, a blackboard, chalk and brushes, a globe, a clock, a dictionary, a bell, a broom, a wood box or a coal bucket and a shovel for the stove. Paper and books were hard to find, so textbooks were often shared. Students used slates and chalk like small blackboards to solve math problems or to write down answers to the teacher's questions.

Paper and pens were used for exams or to practice handwriting, but the pens back then were made of quills from birds and were dipped in pots of ink to write. It made for a big mess when the ink spilled on the desk, floor, or student. Students also used pencils, which was a safety hazard as pencils were sharpened with a knife.

Schools were often unsanitary and unsafe. Ventilation was inadequate, there was no running water, and since the buildings were often built from wood and heated by an open stove, the risk of fire was ever-present.

Schoolyards usually consisted of a well, one or more outhouses, and woodpiles. Due to unsanitary conditions, contracting a contagious disease such as diphtheria or typhoid was high. Factors such as overcrowding or human waste seeping into the walls posed a serious health risk to the teacher and students. ¹

Most teachers in rural communities were young women who taught elementary education to local students. Teachers were poorly paid and took on the burden of maintaining the schools themselves.



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University and college campuses are costly enterprises.

To cut costs, most universities and colleges outsource work and hire third-party suppliers, contractors and vendors to maintain buildings and operate facilities.

Fast forward to 2020

Health and safety in schools looked very different over 100 years ago. There were risks and hazards but not like what we face in schools or on campuses today. Now a campus looks and functions like a small town or city. It is a costly enterprise that includes many of the following:

- Halls/classrooms
- Dormitories/housing
- Theatre
- Labs
- Athletic facilities
- Student health center
- Library
- Cafeteria
- Staff offices
- Maintenance facilities
- Campus security office
- Greenhouse
- Campus IT/data centre facility
- Atrium space
- University hospital (on some campuses)



Today education leaders are responsible for the health, safety and welfare of faculty, students, staff, visitors, and volunteers. It takes personnel and expertise to maintain the facilities and structures on campus. To cut costs, most universities and colleges outsource work and hire third-party suppliers, contractors and vendors (third parties) to maintain buildings and operate facilities.

Facility managers oversee building maintenance, snow removal, landscaping, and construction projects on campus. Some building and facility-related concerns are temperature control, lighting, housekeeping issues, smells, indoor air quality, broken furniture, elevator malfunction, water leaks, and many more.

Delivery personnel are also on campus regularly delivering products and supplies like electronics, laptops, books, office and lab equipment, gym equipment and food and beverages. The maintenance and repair of office equipment, including computers, printers, and systems, is also provided by product suppliers who visit various campus departments.

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Easily qualify third parties using an automated compliance management system.

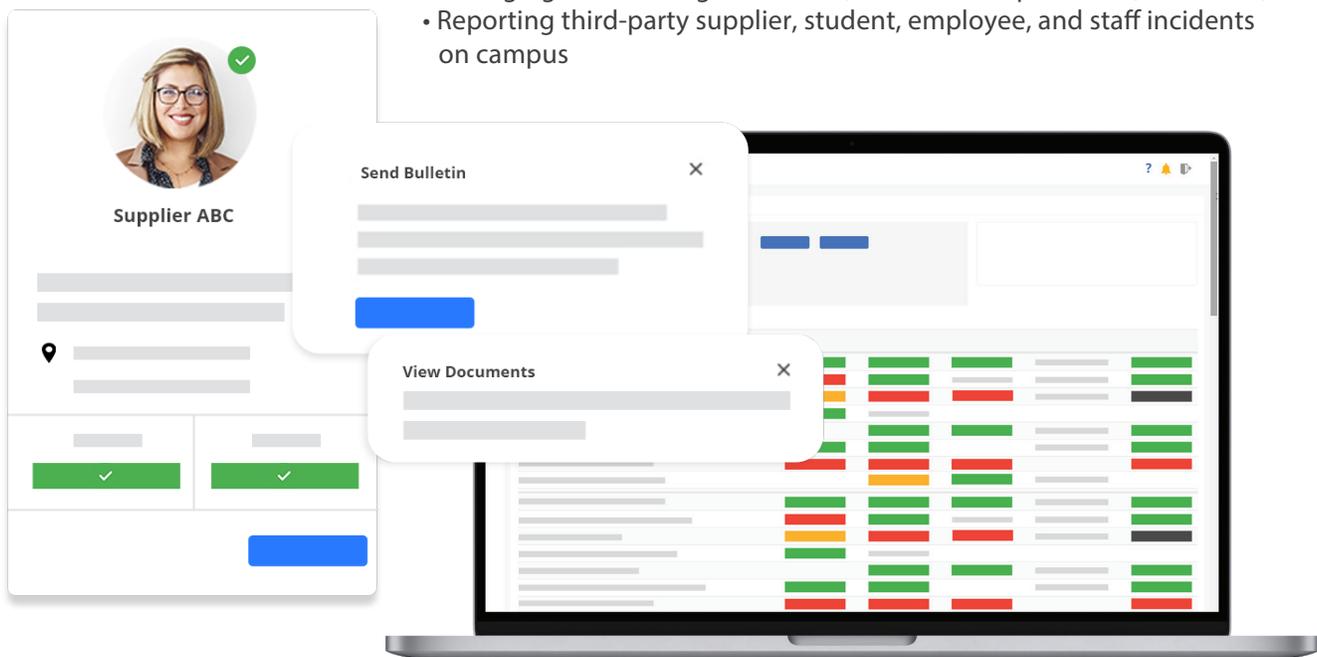
Managing compliance within supply chains is increasingly complex.

With a large number of suppliers, contractors and vendors coming and going across campus, managing compliance within supply chains is increasingly complex. Because many departments within these institutions tend to operate as a silo, the opportunity for injuries and incidents increases.

Working together as a united front to identify and mitigate risk at both the organization and worker levels helps everyone stay ahead of risk on and off-campus.

The challenge many institutions face is collecting, tracking, and reporting data across all departments to ensure compliance requirements are met. Spreadsheets are becoming obsolete, and automated systems are necessary to manage and address the following challenges:

- Manual and siloed safety systems/processes/protocols
- Efficiently screening third-party suppliers/contractors/vendors
- Timely communication - bulletins, orientations
- Offering the necessary training
- Tracking onsite tasks: e.g. inspections, incidents, remediation, non-conformance, hazard assessments
- Managing and tracking certificates, worker's compensation, insurance, etc
- Reporting third-party supplier, student, employee, and staff incidents on campus



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Waiting to improve your safety program could be a costly mistake.

A staff researcher died from injuries sustained in a 2008 chemistry laboratory fire at UCLA, leaving the university under intense regulatory scrutiny.

Accidents do happen and risk is widespread

Managing and mitigating risks is crucial in keeping everyone safe, and when there are shortfalls in the process or protocols – there can be serious and fatal accidents.

Off-Campus

In September 2019, a deadly bus crash killed two University of Victoria students when a charter bus with 43 other students on board drove off a gravel road and down an embankment. The students were travelling to Bamfield Marine Sciences Centre for an annual field trip.

An initial report made more than 40 recommendations to the school, saying dozens of changes were necessary to make future field trips safer and to better support families in case of disaster. The review found the school needs to improve its protocols for hazard assessments, trip-planning, student support and emergency response after falling short in those areas before and after the fatal crash.²

On-Campus

A staff researcher died from injuries sustained in a 2008 chemistry laboratory fire at UCLA, leaving the university under intense regulatory scrutiny. Adding further complexity to the campus response efforts was unprecedented, and there was widespread attention from mainstream and industry media and research institutions across the nation.

UCLA took quick action to improve its laboratory safety program. Given the size of UCLA's lab researcher population and the campus's decentralized nature, it was a daunting task to reach out and improve compliance with newly implemented safety policies. The Office of Environment, Health and Safety (EH&S) improved operations, enhanced overall inspection procedures, and instituted mandatory laboratory safety training of PIs and researchers.³

UCLA migrated from a paper-based questionnaire to an online reporting system to aid in identifying hazards, tracking laboratory space and personnel, and ensuring lab groups are compliant with personal protective equipment (PPE) policies.

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Reporting incidents on campus is crucial in developing a “leading” safety program.

It was recommended that campuses conduct safety audits and surveys to identify hotspots and consider specific design improvements for each of the three danger zones to reduce risks.

Everyday Risks

If you think riding your bike or crossing the road as a pedestrian on campus is safe, think again. A study by the Journal of the American Planning Association ⁴ found college campuses have high levels of walking and biking in conjunction with high levels of vehicular traffic, which increases risks for cyclists and pedestrians. Distracted or inattentive pedestrians and quick cyclists are contributing factors to most collisions.

It was recommended that campuses conduct safety audits and surveys to identify hotspots and consider specific design improvements for each of the three danger zones to reduce risks.

Slips, trips, and falls are the most common of workplace hazards, and this goes for on-campus, too, especially during the winter months when snow and ice on sidewalks and roads can present a greater risk.

Typical risk situations for slips, trips and falls:

- Wet or oily surfaces
- Accidental spills
- Loose or unanchored rugs or mats
- Change of floor traction from one area to another
- Dark and/or obstructed pathways

It is also quite likely that many falls occur, but aren't reported as injuries are trivial, or there is no process or protocol in place to report these types of incidents.

When managing compliance, it's vital to report and track near misses or injury incidents to help build a better picture of the risks across a campus, which allows for faster targeted and preventative changes to mitigate future risks.

Practicing and promoting safety should come from the top down. When leadership embraces a safety culture, it enables more than safety – it benefits worker's confidence and retention, organizational behaviour and even productivity.

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How ComplyWorks can help.

According to OSHA, developing a strong safety culture has the most significant impact on accident reduction of any process. Creating a safety culture should be a top priority for any institution. It builds trusted relationships and ensures compliance within your institution and with third parties who also need to agree with your company's code of ethics, compliance policies, procedures, and guidelines.⁵

Occupational health and safety (OHS) training should be mandatory for everyone on site – it's a shared responsibility to maintain a safe and healthy work and learning environment. College and university assets go far beyond the physical and financial and include faculty, staff, students, and reputation.

Risk managers in higher education have busy jobs. They address various ever-changing risks, including emergency management, reputational risk, insurance coverage and claims, minors on campus, sexual assault response, cybersecurity, natural disasters, international travel, etc.

Having one automated platform with various solutions to help manage compliance across all departments and risk disciplines makes for efficient and safe operations.

ComplyWorks' solutions are flexible, scalable, and affordable to go beyond basic governance, risk management and compliance (GRC) requirements. If you already have a GRC process, we will help you take this process to your third parties for a consistent approach throughout your operations.

Empower your suppliers, contractors and vendors to take control of their compliance through our easy to use solution – from prequalification and supplier management to Worksite and Workforce Management.

Committing to creating a safe and healthy learning and living environment for students, faculty and staff is imperative. Aligning institutional goals and safety initiatives with third-party suppliers/contractors will also help mitigate risk and create an extended safety culture within your supply chain on and off-campus.

Sources:

- ¹ <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/rural-teachers-in-canada>
- ² <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/bam-field-bus-crash-report-university-of-victoria-1.5626768>
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