

RISK SIMPLIFIED

QUESTIONS

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In-Wall Cafeteria Table Safety and Supervision

by Scarlett Sadler

Agencies across the state of California are feeling the effects of vandalism and copper theft. Copper is a valuable metal that is often collected and stolen because of its high scrap value. California is home to over 150,000 in-wall and wall pocket cafeteria table systems can pose significant safety risks if not properly operated, supervised, inspected, and secured. These systems contain heavy moving components, folding mechanisms, locking devices, and potential crush or pinch-point hazards that may result in serious injury if tables are improperly operated, inadequately secured, or accessed without appropriate supervision. Because these systems are large and heavy, even a single misuse incident or equipment failure may result in catastrophic injury.

Supervision and Operational Considerations

Vigilance is important anytime cafeteria tables are being moved, folded, deployed, or stored. School districts should consider limiting the operation of these systems to employees familiar with proper operating procedures and establishing clear expectations regarding who is authorized to handle the equipment.

Risk may increase during transition periods when tables are being deployed, folded, cleaned, transported, or stored. During these activities, both students and employees may be exposed to moving equipment, partially secured tables, wall storage pockets, pinch points, or other hazards that may not be immediately recognized. Ideally, students are not present when tables are being operated. Horseplay, climbing, hanging on tables, or improper attempts to move equipment can significantly increase the potential for injury.

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- Restricting the operation of cafeteria table systems to employees familiar with proper operating procedures
- Physically verifying tables are fully locked after deployment or storage
- Keeping students away from moving or partially secured tables
- Limiting student access to wall storage pockets and controls
- Removing damaged or malfunctioning equipment from service
- Establishing routine inspection and reporting procedures
- Encouraging employees to report damaged or difficult-to-operate equipment immediately
- Following the manufacturer's operating and maintenance recommendations
- Prohibiting students, volunteers, parents, third-party facility users, and other unauthorized individuals from operating cafeteria table systems
- Evaluating whether table storage compartments, controls, or operating mechanisms can be physically secured or locked when not in use to help prevent unauthorized operation

Staff should avoid assuming a table is secure simply because it appears locked or fully stored. Locking mechanisms and other safety components may wear over time, become damaged, or fail to fully engage, especially if equipment is not routinely inspected and maintained. Given the size, weight, and moving components associated with in-wall cafeteria table systems, school districts should evaluate whether current supervision, inspection, storage, and operational practices appropriately address the potential risks these systems pose.

For questions regarding safety considerations for in-wall cafeteria tables, please contact your GSRMA Risk Control Advisor or Member Services at memberservices@gsrma.org.