

Practicing Cybersecurity & Classroom Safety

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, the upcoming fall semester holds unknowns. There are already schools deciding to remain completely online, while some are planning for in-person classes but know they may need to adjust. Others still may see a hybrid model of in-person and online study.

While you prepare for the new school year, include time to consider your potential risks, both in an online and in-person classroom.

Cybersecurity Risks in an Online Classroom

Cybersecurity is an increased threat right now for educators, individuals and businesses alike. As remote learning and working have become standard, hacking and phishing attempts went up 37% from February 2020 to March 2020.¹ Refresh yourself on all your school's cybersecurity policies and also refresh yourself on best practices for cybersecurity:

- + Be wary of suspicious links. Check the sender email address for misspellings or unusual web addresses, hover over the link to see if links to a different website and work with your IT team if you see anything suspicious.
- + Make sure you have unique, strong passwords for your Wi-Fi, computer, email and any software or platforms you use. It is recommended to use a unique password for each login that incorporates letters, symbols and numbers. Experts suggest using a password that is at least eight characters long. An additional recommendation is to use three or four random words for your password.

In the online learning environment, there has been an increased sharing of information to give more access to high-quality education. However, it is important to be cognizant of actual or alleged infringement on intellectual property claims. This includes copyright, plagiarism, piracy or misappropriation of ideas. Additionally, mindfully avoid any infringements on titles, slogans, trademarks, trade names, service marks or service names. These intentional or unintentional actions could result in an unwanted case against you.

¹ <https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/cyberattacks-up-37-over-past-month/>

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/01/nyregion/alonzo-ya-nes-burned-school-chemistry.html>

In-Person Classroom Risks

While you, as an educator, take the highest precautions against intentionally or unintentionally bringing harm to a student or property, the risk remains. Despite following your school's guidelines and current standards for curriculum and experiments, an unwanted incident with injury or property damage may occur. Many educational systems have academic indemnity, but it can be overridden in cases of negligence.

Just last year, a jury awarded \$60 million to a New York City student who was severely burned during a chemistry demonstration his teacher was conducting in 2014.² The demonstration, meant to show the emission spectra from salts burning in methanol, resulted in a large flame jet that engulfed the student. While this is an extreme example, it demonstrates the importance of educating teachers about hazards and risks related to working with chemicals in their classrooms where students are at risk.

Demonstrating Due Diligence

As educators, you have the obligation to educate yourself in 21st century chemical safety pedagogy and perform risk assessments on your experiments and demonstrations. Being able to demonstrate due diligence gives you another layer of protection if you find yourself in a legal liability case due to your work.

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