



WELLNESS

AND

Safety



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SCHOOLS INSURANCE
AUTHORITY

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START THE NEW YEAR STRONG

A Guide to Weighted Vest Benefits, Selection and Safe Usage.

As we kick off the New Year, many of us are thinking about personal health goals for 2026. Whether it's improving fitness, building strength, or supporting overall health, weighted vests are becoming an increasingly popular tool that can help you achieve these goals. From enhancing workouts to supporting bone health and boosting metabolism, a weighted vest can be a valuable addition to your routine. This guide explores the benefits, selecting a vest, and tips for safe use to help you make the most of this fitness accessory.

What Is a Weighted Vest?

A weighted vest is a wearable fitness accessory designed to add resistance to your body during physical activity. Adjustable to your needs, it evenly distributes weight across your torso, increasing exercise intensity without compromising form.

Who Can Benefit from a Weighted Vest?

- Older adults looking to support bone and muscle health.
- Fitness enthusiasts wanting to intensify workouts.
- Individuals managing weight who want to boost daily calorie burn.

Vests are **not recommended** for anyone with joint, back or mobility issues, pregnant individuals or anyone new to exercise, without medical guidance.

Choosing the Right Weighted Vest

- **Start Light:** Begin with 5–10% of your body weight (typically 5–15 lbs.) Gradually increase weight over time.
- **Fit and Comfort:** Look for even weight distribution, adjustable straps, and breathable materials.
- **Intended Use:** Lightweight vests for walking/hiking, slim secure vests for high-intensity workouts, or heavier vests with removable weights for strength training.



Benefits of Using a Weighted Vest



- **Enhanced Strength and Endurance:** Adding a weighted vest to bodyweight exercises like, squats, lunges, or walking stimulates greater muscle strength and endurance.
- **Bone Health Support:** Weighted vests can help maintain bone mineral density, especially for older adults or postmenopausal women. While they may not prevent bone loss during weight reduction, they can preserve lean muscle mass, supporting overall skeletal health.
- **Improved Cardiovascular Fitness:** Using a vest during cardio activities such as hiking, stair climbing, or walking increases heart rate and caloric burn, enhancing aerobic capacity.
- **Metabolic Boost and Fat Loss:** Extra resistance from a vest increases energy expenditure, supporting fat loss while preserving muscle mass when combined with proper nutrition and training.

Continued on Page 2



TIPS FOR SAFE USE

(Continued from Page 1)

Do:

- Warm up before adding weight load
- Start slowly-try a 10-minute walk with 5-10 lbs. and progress overtime
- Maintain correct posture
- Increase weight gradually
- Use consistently for best results

Don't:

- Use if you have joint or back concerns without medical approval
- Wear for hours during normal daily tasks, without breaks
- Neglect proper posture; poor alignment increases risk of injury
- Add a vest before mastering bodyweight form/alignment

As you move forward with your 2026 wellness goals, incorporating a weighted vest can be a simple yet powerful way to build strength, support overall health, and stay motivated throughout the year. Remember to start light, listen to your body, and prioritize safety as you add resistance to your routine. With consistency and mindful progression, a weighted vest can help you begin the New Year stronger, healthier, and ready to make lasting positive changes.

Source: [The Complete Guide to Weighted Vests](#)

- **Harmony with Nature:** For Marcus, loving one's fate meant aligning his will with the nature of the universe. Resisting fate was seen as irrational and a source of unhappiness.

Imagine viewing your own life through an “Amor Fati” lens. How may this mindset shape your daily thoughts and behaviors? If we are overly resistant to future life experiences we adopt a resistant life perspective. When we adopt a similar mindset of Lt. Dan upon the upper mast of a shrimp boat in the middle of violent storm (Forest Gump) we can begin viewing life’s circumstances from a “seize the day” mentality.

In each moment of challenge, we are faced with two decisions: to embrace reality or to resist the reality of life. When we become resistant to reality we tend to focus on negative emotions and feelings, resulting in a perception of being a victim of circumstance instead of an active participant in our destiny. (Continued in Page 3)

AMOR FATI

Marshall Shimmon, B.S., SIA Prevention Services Coordinator

With the passing of the holidays many people are still reminiscing about the time spent with family and friends, the food they already miss, and the movies they watched while in a food coma. For some, the search for a movie with both historical context and action may have brought them to the portrayal of the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius in the movie Gladiator. Diehard fans may not know that the Latin phrase "amor fati" (love of fate) was the underlying concept and cornerstone of Marcus Aurelius's Stoic philosophy. Marcus Aurelius, in his book *Meditations*, expressed the idea of not merely accepting fate, but fully embracing it as part of the harmonious and rational cosmic order (Logos).



Key Concepts in Marcus Aurelius's Writings

- **Acceptance of the Cosmic Order:** Marcus believed that everything that happens is part of a larger, necessary, and benevolent plan. He wrote, **"To love only what happens, what was destined. No greater harmony."**
- **Adversity as Fuel:** He viewed challenges and obstacles not as hindrances, but as opportunities for growth and the exercise of virtue. A famous quote of his, illustrating this is, **"A blazing fire makes flame and brightness out of everything that is thrown into it."** This means that a stoic mind can transform any adversity into fuel for its own potential.
- **Focus on Response, Not Events:** The core Stoic principle, heavily emphasized by Marcus, is that we do not control external events, only our internal responses to them. Amor fati is the ultimate expression of this, where one chooses to love their circumstances, rather than simply endure.



- For school districts, cybersecurity is no longer just an IT issue. It's an educational continuity and student safety issue.



AMOR FATI *(Continued from page 2)*

During challenging situations and circumstances, it's too convenient to focus on things we can't change or why we are upset. However, when we focus more on what we can positively contribute to the situation we help facilitate the outcome we desire. During times of reflection many wish that they had said something different, acted with more composure, had a more optimistic mindset, or did something different. Before reacting to a life stressor, pause for a moment and ask yourself how you would like to remember your thoughts, actions, and behaviors in that moment.

WHY IDENTITY SECURITY IS ESSENTIAL FOR SCHOOL DISTRICT CYBERSECURITY

Gustavo Mastroianni, SIA Chief Information Security Officer

School districts today manage more digital accounts and more sensitive data than ever before. With widespread adoption of cloud-based learning platforms, 1:1 device programs, remote access needs, and complex networks, protecting student and staff identities has become a critical component of district cybersecurity.

Identity security ensures that only the right people (students, teachers, staff, and approved partners) can access district systems. In an era where cyberattacks on K-12 is rapidly increasing; identity is now the frontline defense.

School districts manage thousands (sometimes tens of thousands) of student and staff accounts. Each account represents a potential entry point for attackers. A single compromised identity can allow attackers to access student information, disrupt instruction, and compromise learning platforms. Identity security drastically reduces the likelihood of these events.

School districts also hold some of the most sensitive data imaginable, such as educational records, behavioral and disciplinary information, and staff HR and payroll information. Identity security ensures only authorized individuals have access to this information, supporting compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA).



Strong identity controls help school districts demonstrate due diligence in audits and protect against liability. To protect students, staff, and district resources, school systems should prioritize Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA), Privileged Access Management, Behavioral and Login Monitoring, and Regular Access Reviews.

For school districts, cybersecurity is no longer just an IT issue. It's an educational continuity and student safety issue. When identities are compromised, instruction stops, personal data is exposed, and the school district operations come to a halt.

Identity is the new foundation of K-12 cybersecurity and investing in it is investing in the safety and success of every student and educator.



ERGONOMIC TOOLBOX TIPS

Lita Chang, B.S., SIA Ergonomist

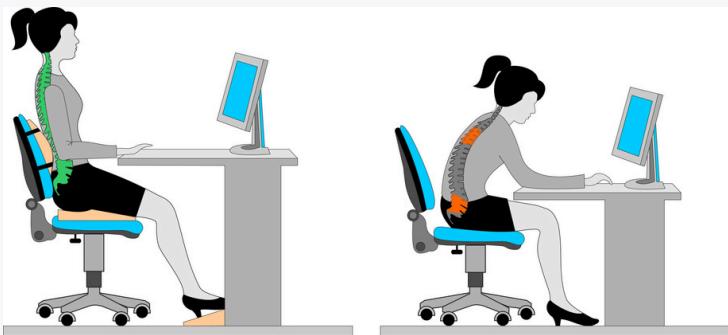
A few small adjustments to how you organize your workspace can make a big difference in your comfort and efficiency. By arranging your equipment strategically, you can support better posture, reduce unnecessary strain, and create a more productive work environment throughout your day. Here are a few useful tips to keep in mind when organizing your workspace.

- Keep frequently used items close. Place essentials like your phone, planner, or notebook within arm's reach to avoid repetitive stretching.
- Optimize your keyboard and mouse position. Keep them comfortably close and use a light touch when typing or clicking.
- Use a headset for calls. If you spend a lot of time on the phone, a headset can help you avoid cradling the phone between your ear and shoulder.

Small changes add up. Setting up your space thoughtfully can help you feel your best throughout the workday.

For more information check out SIA's YouTube video on how to [Create an Ideal Workstation](#)

Watch for more tips in future Wellness & Safety editions.



Setting up your space thoughtfully can help you feel your best throughout the workday.

SPOTLIGHT ON...



WOODLAND'S BEHIND-THE-SCENES SUPERSTARS: MAINTENANCE & OPERATIONS

SIA recently had the pleasure of presenting at Woodland Joint Unified School District's Maintenance & Operations (M&O) In-Service Training, organized by M&O Supervisor Lucy Lepe. The day was packed with engaging, hands-on sessions covering essential topics like injury prevention, floor stripping, and playground inspections.

Staff in-service days like this one offer valuable time for employees and supervisors to collaborate, refresh skills, review policies, and stay aligned on best practices. They also serve as an important reminder of just how much dedication and effort the M&O team brings each day. Their hard work is vital in keeping school environments clean, functional, and safe for students and staff.

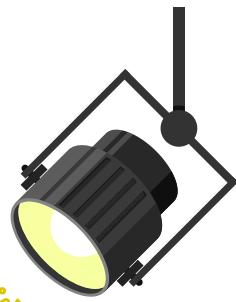


A heartfelt thank-you to the entire Woodland M&O team for the pride and professionalism you bring to your work. Your commitment makes a meaningful difference in the district every single day.

Does your district have an upcoming in-service, health, or safety event?

Invite SIA to participate—it's a free benefit for all member districts!

Email us at PreventionServices@sia-jpa.org



- *Playgrounds support physical, social, and cognitive development*
- *Proper maintenance is critical for safety*

PLAY SMART, PLAY SAFE: THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAYGROUND INSPECTIONS



Lisa Konarski, CPSI, SIA Prevention Services



Are playgrounds necessary? Absolutely! Playgrounds provide the opportunity to build physical strength and agility while developing risk assessment skills. Children improve their social abilities when interacting with their peers, learn to share and take turns, and how to work with others. Recess and use of the play equipment also provides an opportunity for students to release energy so they can better focus when they return to the classroom.

But the benefits of the playground can only be realized when the equipment is properly maintained. Poor maintenance is the second leading factor in injuries after poor supervision.

The California Health and Safety Code (section 11575) requires public playgrounds to follow the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) playground guidelines and the ASTM playground standards. Both CPSC and ASTM require ongoing maintenance as defined by the manufacturer of the equipment.

Regular inspections identify problems and will help district staff maintain the equipment. Inspection frequency depends upon the age of the equipment, local climate, amount of use, the type of equipment, as well as vandalism history. When problems are identified early, staff can make timely corrections that will prevent injuries and prolong the life of the equipment.

District maintenance employees, site custodians and playground supervisors play an important role in the maintenance and inspections of the playground. Who is responsible for inspecting the playgrounds at your school? If you don't know, now is the time to ask.

Those responsible for the inspections should start with an inspection checklist that is specific to the equipment on your playground. The manufacturer of your equipment will provide a checklist. You can also visit the [SIA website](#) for inspection checklists that can be adapted to your playgrounds. (*Continued in Page 6*)

- *Is hardware loose or missing?*
- *Playgrounds require consistent inspection to remain safe*

When conducting an inspection, here are just a few questions to consider: (Continued from Page 5)

- What is the condition of the protective surfacing? If you have loose material, are there areas that are bare? Are weeds growing in the material? If you have unitary surfacing, are there tears?
- Are any components missing or broken? Do you need to remove broken pieces and does the removal require the area or the entire playground to be closed off from use? Do you have a response plan in place?
- Is hardware loose or missing? Are connections for moving components worn? S-hooks and other connections wear quickly due to movement, and the wear is not always obvious. You must move the connections to check them.
- Is signage present? There should be labels on the equipment or signs near the equipment that indicate the appropriate age of the user, the need for supervision, and more. The age of the user is determined by the manufacturer based on the physical abilities of the age group, either 2-5 years or 5-12 years.
- Is there anything foreign on the equipment or in the playground area? Inappropriate use during off hours may result in vandalism or broken glass and other dangerous debris. It is especially important to check first thing after a weekend or holiday. Also, equipment intended for residential use, such as plastic playhouses, is not allowed on the playground. All equipment must be secured to the ground.



Documentation is also essential to your maintenance and inspection program. Keep copies of all inspections, completed work orders, receipts for surfacing material and equipment, original installation instructions, surfacing testing documentation, and any other paperwork related to each playground. Check with your district for documentation procedures. Documentation is especially important in the event of a claim or lawsuit. If you don't document, your maintenance work did not happen.

To help with your maintenance program, SIA has a playground inspection instructional video on our website, [Conducting a Routine Playground Inspection](#). The video is available for viewing in both English and Spanish. It is also available in Public School Works course #M-913.

Playgrounds require consistent attention to remain safe and functional. Ensure your district and school site have a playground care program in place. Proactive maintenance and inspections will reduce injuries, protect district resources, and help our children play, learn, and grow safely.



- Cleaning supplies and pesticides must be handled with caution on school sites

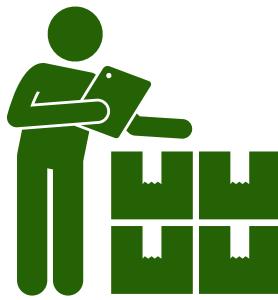


Safety Bulletin

CHEMICAL SAFETY: BEST PRACTICES FOR STAFF AND EDUCATORS

The improper storage of chemicals on a school campus is one of the most common findings during an SIA safety inspection. All schools have cleaning supplies, pesticides, science chemicals, art supplies, and other materials that must be handled with caution. Title 8 of the California Code of Regulations and the California Department of Education provide guidance for chemicals on a school site. Review your district procedures and consider the following:

- Only district approved chemicals should be on site. Site administration should be consulted before any other chemicals are purchased.
- Provide a Safety Data Sheet (SDS) for each chemical on campus. The SDS provides information on proper usage, storage, and essential emergency information. All staff should have access to the SDS. If teachers or other staff bring in chemicals from home, they must obtain an SDS from the manufacturer's website. An SDS is required for every brand and scent, and it must be kept where the chemical is stored.
- Ensure all documents and binders are updated to SDS. MSDS are no longer valid as of 2015 and should be filed as historical documents.
- Ensure all chemicals are properly labeled. Secondary containers must include content labeling. Simply writing "cleaner" on the bottle is not enough.
- Personal protective equipment (gloves, goggles, masks) should be available and used by all staff managing the chemicals.
- Conduct annual inspections and inventory of classrooms, janitorial closets, science chemical storage rooms, and cabinets. Unused or expired chemicals should be removed or disposed of properly.
- Hazardous chemicals must be stored in designated, well-ventilated areas and not accessible to students. Incompatible chemicals must be separated (e.g., acids away from bases, flammables away from oxidizers). Secondary containment is preferred.
- Inspect and test emergency equipment (e.g., eye-wash stations, safety showers), fume hoods, and ventilation systems/exhaust fans at least once a year.
- Plug-in air fresheners are not recommended, as they can pose a fire hazard. Check your district policy and/or the most recent fire inspection report, as they may not be permitted. Air fresheners may also trigger breathing issues for students and others in the vicinity.
- Per the Healthy Schools Act (HSA), ensure your certificated staff (i.e., teachers) are trained on Basic Integrated Pest Management for the classroom environment. Lysol wipes, disinfectants, etc. are considered pesticides in a school environment. Classes are available on Public School Works, Course Number M-991



- Take a few precautionary steps to avoid accidents during the winter months



Safety Bulletin

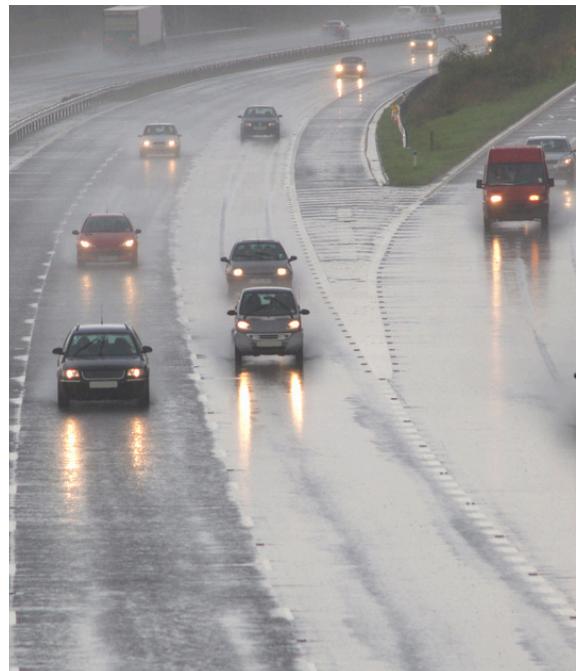


WINTER SAFETY: PREVENTING SLIPS AND DRIVING HAZARDS

Cold, wet, and icy winter conditions present unique safety challenges. Taking a few extra precautions can significantly reduce the risk of injury and accidents.

Winter Driving

- Allow extra travel time. Winter conditions can significantly increase travel times. If you are running late, notify others. Do not rush.
- Make sure your cell phone is fully charged before driving in case of delays or emergencies.
- Adjust your speed to road and weather conditions, even if roads appear clear.
- Increase following distance. Allow at least 10 seconds between your vehicle and the one ahead to safely come to a complete stop.
- Use extra caution on bridges, overpasses, and roads with limited sun exposure, as these areas often freeze first and stay slippery.
- Do not activate your cruise control when driving on wet, icy, or slippery roads.
- Check weather conditions along your route and at your destination before traveling. Postpone the trip if conditions are unsafe.
- Drive defensively. Stay alert and assume other drivers may not be exercising the same level of caution. You are responsible for your safety and the safety of your passengers.



Preventing Slips, Trips, and Falls on Wet and Icy Surfaces



- Walk slowly and stay focused on your route of travel. Be aware of changing surface conditions and your surroundings.
- Wear non-slip, well-fitting shoes with flat heels.
- Use handrails when going up or down stairs and ramps.
- Keep your hands free and at your sides, not in your pockets, to help maintain balance.
- If necessary, carry small loads and ensure your line of sight is not obstructed.
- Use designated pedestrian pathways and avoid shortcuts, especially across wet or uneven surfaces.
- Post warning signage and restrict access to hazardous areas when icy or slippery conditions cannot be immediately corrected.
- Report icy or unsafe walking conditions promptly so they can be addressed.

SIA created a short video to help school staff prevent slips, trips, and falls. This video is available to view and share on our [SIA YouTube channel](#).

FREE VIRTUAL TRAININGS TO ENHANCE YOUR LIFE

SIA provides the staff of our member districts with virtual training on a variety of topics that apply to both personal and professional life. To learn more or register for any of the training courses listed below, click the course title or contact tfranco@sia-jpa.org. You also can join our [email list](#) to learn of future events at SIA – Schools Insurance Authority (sia-jpa.org).



1/15	How to Use Conflict as Opportunity for Employees	12:00-1:00pm
1/15	How to Use Conflict as Opportunity for Employees	5:30-6:30pm
1/20	Embracing Happiness	5:30-6:30pm
1/21	Imposter Syndrome	5:30-6:30pm
1/22	Improving Workplace Relationships	5:30-6:30pm
1/26	Intimate Partner and Family Violence Awareness for Managers	5:30-6:30pm
1/27	Preventing Burnout	5:30-6:30pm
2/3	Menopause in the Workplace	5:30-6:30pm
2/4	Parenting in an Ever-Changing World	5:30-6:30pm
2/5	Preventing Sexual Harassment, Employee	5:30-6:30pm
2/11	Social Media: Use and Misuse	5:30-6:30pm
2/17	Critical Incident Stress in the Workplace for Managers	5:30-6:30pm
2/18	Support through Perinatal Loss and Infertility	5:30-6:30pm
2/24	Autism and ADHD in the Workplace	5:30-6:30pm
2/25	How to Beat Fatigue and Sleep Better	12:00-1:00pm
2/25	How to Beat Fatigue and Sleep Better	5:30-6:30pm
3/3	Business Etiquette	5:30-6:30pm
3/4	Strategies for Supporting Neurodivergent Family and Friends	5:30-6:30pm
3/9	How to Build Workplace Motivation and Morale	5:30-6:30pm



Speak it. Believe it. Become it.

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