

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS – FACILITIES AND INTERNAL OPERATIONS

INTRODUCTION

Most Michigan municipalities perform public works functions of one type or another. Some departments are very small, with one or two employees; others are very large, with 100 or more employees. Regardless of size, all public works departments have shared areas of operations and concerns that affect workplace safety for employees and visitors. This document addresses some of the major issues that are common to all public works departments (DPW).

SAFETY REQUIREMENTS – FACILITIES AND OPERATIONS

The Department of Public Works (DPW) should, at a minimum, assure the following in its facilities and operations:

Walkways and entryways that are safe for DPW employees and visitors

- It is important for these areas to be free of trip or slip hazards.
- Entries should be clearly visible and free of obstructions and well lit.
- During the winter months, pay particular attention to keeping walkways and stairs clear of ice and snow.
- The department should not permit the storage of equipment or materials in front of or directly adjacent to entries. Remember that both employees and the public use the DPW's facility.
- Conduct regular inspections to assure walkways, stairs, and entryways are free of recognized hazards.

Well-maintained and accessible means of egress

- A means of egress is a continuous and unobstructed way of exit travel from any point in a building or structure to a public way.
- A means of egress has three distinct parts: (1) the way of exit access, (2) the exit, and (3) the way of exit discharge.
- Conduct regular inspections to assure all exits are accessible and functioning.
- During winter weather, ensure snow and ice are removed from the area around the outside exit doors to permit unrestricted opening of the door.

Adequate heating, lighting and ventilation

- **Heating:** Many activities take place in the DPW facility. Always consider the facility “occupied.” Temperature extremes can harm personnel and damage materials and equipment. The negative effects that temperature extremes can generate may create conditions that lead to accidents and, therefore, indirectly to injuries and damage to the facility.
- **Lighting:** General lighting should produce uniform illumination throughout the workplace. Lighting should be sufficient to allow personnel to perform their duties easily and move about the facility safely. Where greater illumination is necessary, the department should install increased general lighting or task lights.
- **Ventilation:** The DPW facility should have sufficient ventilation to assure a healthy and comfortable work environment. The department should pay special attention to processes or activities that produce by-products such as vapor, gases, fumes, or dust that may be injurious to employees.

Sufficient fire protection throughout facility

- Fire protection includes all measures the department takes to safeguard human life and the preservation of property through preventing, detecting and extinguishing fire. An effective fire loss control program:
 - prevents fires from occurring;
 - prevents the loss of life and personal injury should a fire occur;
 - protects property;
 - prevents interrupted operations.
- It is important to ensure that qualified personnel conduct a review of department fire protection.

Proper storage of flammables

- The proper storage of flammables is critical to preventing fire. One of the most effective steps the department can take is to store flammables properly.
- Stored quantities should be less than 60 gallons and storage should be in an approved flammable storage cabinet.
- Store small quantities of gasoline or other flammables (under five gallons) in UL approved safety cans.
- If the department keeps large quantities of flammables (61+ gallons) on hand, then it should build a properly ventilated and drained storage room.

Posting and communication of the emergency preparedness plan to all employees

- The department by itself or in cooperation with other departments should develop an emergency plan for fire and weather related emergencies.

- The department should, at a minimum, post and assure that all employees understand the following:
 - emergency phone numbers and
 - site plan: the plan should clearly identify all routes of travel to exits and the location where employees should meet in the event of a fire or other emergency. The drawing should also show the location of tornado shelters.

Emergency lighting installed if the department uses the facility at night

- For most public entities, public works is a twenty-four hour operation. It is not unusual for crews to be working at night, particularly when power outages occur as a result of storms. Emergency lighting is necessary to assure employees adequate lighting to conduct limited activities.
- Emergency lighting must be checked regularly to ensure proper operation and must be repaired/replaced promptly as necessary.

Installation and regular inspection of security features for the facility

- Security for the DPW facility should be a primary focus, particularly as many DPW facilities are well away from primary roads and typically store a major portion of a municipality's assets in equipment and materials.
- Management should consult with local law enforcement to ensure the building has adequate security. Tour the facility with a member of law enforcement to explore options that will provide the level of security that best meets the needs of the facility.
- Security features should address: door locks, security system, windows, panic hardware, and smoke detection.

Restricted access to and use of the facility

- During work hours, employees should lock the facility when it will be unattended to prevent theft, vandalism, or the unauthorized use of municipal assets.
- Management should directly address personal use of the facility and equipment during or after working hours and prohibit such use by employees and members of the public. Permitting personal use of the facility and equipment increases the municipality' risk exposure to property, liability and personal injury losses.


Implementation of a regular inventory program

An inventory program is an effective means of monitoring department assets. The program allows management to make informed decisions when planning work activities requiring tools or equipment, can thwart theft, and can improve purchasing of supplies and equipment. text.

To evaluate your DPW facilities and operations against best practices, we highly recommend completing these two *MML Risk Management is Good Management Program* Self-Assessments:

- *Facility Safety and Operations Self-Assessment*, available online here: <https://mml.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/B.-Facility-Safety-and-Operations-Self-Assessment-2026-2.pdf>
- *DPW, Water, Wastewater Treatment, and Parks Self-Assessment*, available online here: <https://mml.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/I.-DPW-Water-Parks-Self-Assessment-2026.pdf>

**Contact MML Risk Management Services Staff
or your Loss Control Consultant for more information.**

	Important Phone Numbers
MML Risk Management Services	800.653.2483
Loss Control Services	800.482.2726
MI Department of Labor, CET Division	517. 284.7720

Note:

***This document is not intended to be legal advice.
It only identifies some of the issues surrounding this topic.
Public agencies are encouraged to review their procedures with an expert
or a competent attorney who is knowledgeable about the subject.***