

ACCIDENT ALERT

School Pupil Dies After Falling Through Glass Window

The accident

There was a tragic reminder recently of the dangers of children playing near glass windows. A 12-year-old schoolgirl died from injuries received when she leapt onto a seat to catch a netball and fell through a classroom window.

The netball courts were close to the school buildings and the classroom windows, a distance of 5.6 metres. Seats were positioned just below the windows. The lower row of windows was 1.3 metres from ground level but a pupil standing or jumping up on the seats which were 340 mm high, could easily reach the windows.

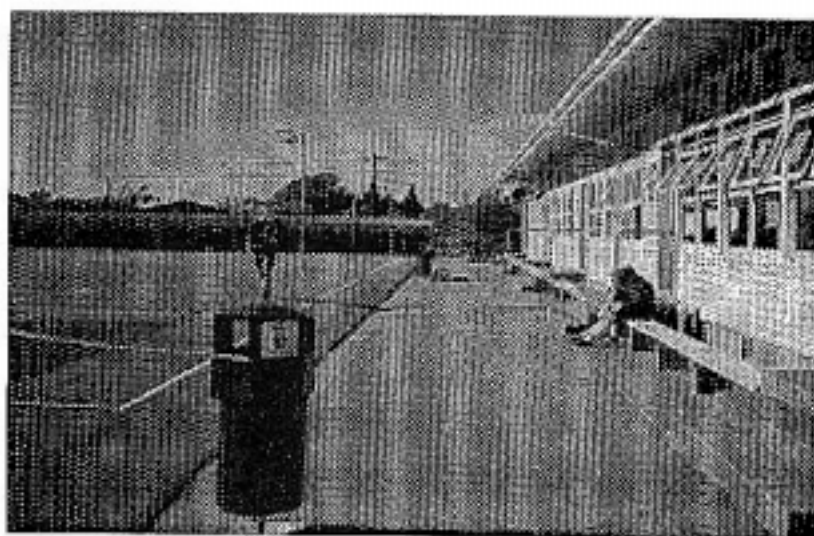
The windows were of 3 mm thick drawn sheet glass, a type which would shatter into sharp jagged fragments on impact.

Action following the accident

The school was requested to ensure pupils did not carry out vigorous activities in front of the classrooms involved until measures aimed at preventing further similar accidents had been implemented.

The following options were suggested to the school by OSH prior to the Coroner's hearing:

1. **Isolate playing areas:** Consider moving playing areas to a safe distance from the glass windows.



Area where the accident occurred showing the proximity of the court to the windows.

2. **Replace drawn glass with safety glass:** If no other options are possible, fit safety glass to a height of 2 metres as specified in NZ Standard NZS 4223: 1993 Part 3 and treat the area concerned as one in which vigorous sporting or specialist activities take place and where there is a high risk of human impact with the glass.
3. **Erect barriers:** This is to prevent pupils from contacting the glass.

What should schools be doing?

The Ministry of Education has prepared a circular for boards of trustees and school principals regarding the examination and upgrade of glass in schools which sets out the actions the Ministry requires all state schools to undertake as a result of the Coroner's findings and recommendations. While these actions are not identical to the options suggested by OSH in respect of the

school involved, OSH fully supports the actions set out by the Ministry. These include identifying, eliminating, isolating and minimising any hazards with respect to windows or glazing.

Schools may approach OSH for assistance in undertaking the actions required, but should contact the Ministry in the first instance.

OSH urges all schools to consider their particular circumstances in relation to the proximity of play and seating areas to glass windows and the potential for an accident to occur.

While the fitting of safety glass would be a costly

option, other more cost-effective solutions, such as referred to above, could be considered.

OSH assistance

OSH is continuing to liaise with the School Trustees Association and the Ministry of Education in respect of their legal obligations towards school staff and pupils under the Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992 and is available to assist both organisations in their endeavours to ensure that such an accident does not occur again.