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Vermont School Boards Insurance Trust

Risk Management Guidance

Emerging safety, liability, and lithium-ion battery considerations for K-12 school districts and school units

From a risk management perspective, we discourage allowing e-bikes, e-scooters, e-motos, and other electric mobility devices on school grounds due to injury, traffic, pedestrian, and lithium-ion battery risks.

If a school chooses to permit these devices, we recommend establishing clear expectations before allowing use on campus. A temporary restriction may be appropriate while procedures are developed. Districts may also want to consider limiting permitted devices to Class 1–3 e-bicycles and prohibiting e-motos and other higher-powered electric mobility devices.

We recommend schools consider the following when deciding whether and how to allow e-bikes, e-scooters, and other electric mobility devices on campus:

- Speed and student behavior: Establish reasonable speed expectations and ensure riders operate devices in a manner appropriate for school grounds. Consider requiring students to walk their bikes while on school grounds.
- Pedestrian interaction: Consider how e-bikes and other devices will interact with students, staff, and visitors walking throughout campus.
- Vehicle interaction: Identify areas where bicycles and motor vehicles may share travel routes and establish expectations to reduce the potential for collisions.
- Parking and storage: Designate appropriate locations for parking and storing devices so they do not obstruct walkways, exits, fire protection equipment, or other areas of concern.
- Battery condition: Establish expectations for identifying damaged, swollen, leaking, or otherwise compromised lithium-ion batteries. Damaged batteries should not be charged or brought into school buildings.
- Charging: Student-owned devices and batteries should not be charged inside school buildings. If charging is permitted elsewhere on campus, use a protected location away from buildings with equipment appropriate for the device and GFCI-protected electrical service.
- Enforcement and communication: Clearly communicate expectations to students, parents/guardians, and staff to establish consistent consequences for violations.
- Policy and procedures: Formal policy or student handbook language should be developed by the school board, with legal counsel involved as appropriate.

We recognize that schools already have significant responsibilities and competing priorities. The goal should be to establish simple, clear, and practical expectations that are appropriate to the level of risk, rather than creating an overly complicated process.

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Detailed Guidance and Considerations

Why this is becoming a K-12 risk issue

Electric micromobility is creating a new arrival/dismissal and campus-safety exposure. Devices marketed as “e-bikes” can vary from conventional pedal-assist bicycles to throttle-powered e-motos capable of motorcycle-like speeds. Schools also have limited ability to determine whether a privately owned battery, charger, or electrical system is original, compatible, damaged, or modified.

Know what type of device you are dealing with

Not every electric two-wheeled device is legally an e-bike.

Under Vermont law, an electric bicycle has fully operable pedals, a seat or saddle, and an electric motor of less than 750 watts. Vermont recognizes three classes:

- **Class 1:** Pedal assist up to 20 mph
- **Class 2:** Motor-powered operation up to 20 mph
- **Class 3:** Pedal assist up to 28 mph; operators must be at least 16 years old

Vermont also separately recognizes certain motor-assisted bicycles, including some electric devices up to 1,000 watts. Because of this, wattage or appearance alone may not be enough to determine how a device is legally classified.

Some high-powered or modified devices marketed as e-bikes may fall outside these categories entirely. If a device appears unusually fast, heavily modified, or more like a motorcycle than a bicycle, we recommend addressing the immediate safety concern and seeking additional guidance as needed.

Campus operation

Arrival and dismissal are typically the greatest concern because buses, vehicles, pedestrians, and students may all be moving through the same areas.

If electric devices are permitted, consider:

- Requiring students to dismount in busy pedestrian areas
- Establishing where devices may and may not be ridden
- Providing a designated parking location
- Addressing reckless or unsafe operation
- Considering whether expectations should differ by student age or campus

Schools may also want to consider the broader route students are using to reach campus, not just what happens once they arrive. Vermont Safe Routes to School offers planning, education, and technical resources that can help schools evaluate walking, biking, rolling, traffic, and arrival/dismissal conditions.

Parking, storage and charging

If devices are allowed on campus, we recommend designated outdoor parking whenever practical.

Keep devices away from:

- Building exits and emergency access
- Heavily traveled walkways
- Areas where a battery fire could affect the building or occupants

We recommend that student-owned devices and batteries not be charged inside school buildings.

Battery and fire considerations

NFPA warns that damaged or defective lithium-ion batteries used in e-bikes and e-scooters can overheat, catch fire or explode, and that these fires can burn extremely hot and produce toxic gases. NFPA safety guidance

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) has urged compliance with applicable safety standards, including ANSI/CAN/UL 2849 for e-bike electrical systems and UL 2272 for personal e-mobility devices. CPSC has also documented thermal-runaway concerns involving manufacturing defects, electrical/thermal abuse, physical damage, and incompatible aftermarket components. CPSC guidance

Keep the process manageable

A formal registration or permit system may make sense for some schools, but it is not necessary in every situation.

If only a small number of students are using these devices, a simpler approach may be appropriate. Schools could consider:

- Basic written expectations for students and families
- A simple sign-up or acknowledgment process if helpful
- A designated parking area
- Parent/guardian communication when concerns arise
- A process for removing a device that is damaged, unsafe or otherwise creates a concern

The goal should be to establish enough structure to manage the risk without creating an ongoing administrative program the school does not need.

Be mindful of precedent

Electric transportation technology is changing quickly. Allowing one type of device today may create an expectation that similar or more powerful devices will also be permitted later.

We recommend avoiding overly specific commitments that unintentionally limit the school's ability to respond as technology, device speeds and risks change.

Practical implementation checklist

- ❑ Decide whether student-owned electric transportation devices will be accommodated on campus.
- ❑ Communicate planned parking locations with the local fire department and fire marshal so they are aware of where devices are being stored.
- ❑ Identify any basic expectations for operation and student age.

- ❑ Establish designated outdoor parking where practical, away from the building and other structures..
- ❑ Do not allow student-owned devices or batteries to be charged inside school buildings.
- ❑ Determine how damaged, modified, or unsafe devices will be handled.
- ❑ Consider whether a simple student/parent sign-up or acknowledgment would be useful.
- ❑ Communicate expectations clearly to students and families.
- ❑ Consider whether the approach could create an unintended precedent for other devices.
- ❑ Involve administration, legal counsel or local law enforcement when legal classification or formal policy language needs to be addressed.

Vermont and battery-safety resources

- Vermont electric bicycle definitions — 23 V.S.A. § 4(46)
- Vermont electric bicycle operation — 23 V.S.A. § 1136a
- NFPA E-Bike and E-Scooter Safety
- U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission — Micromobility Battery Safety Guidance
- Vermont Safe Routes to School