

Recreation:  
Issue: 02

Parks and Playground  
Safety

Revised: Nov. 3, 2010

# Safety BULLETIN

## Parks and Playgrounds

Now, with park and playground crews out raking leaves and cleaning parks, it is the perfect opportunity for municipalities to have their crews inspect and double check the safety of their playgrounds, playground equipment and the surrounding areas. The following guidelines should help you reduce your municipality's liability and make your playgrounds safer for the citizens who use them.

### Park Rules

Every park must have established and posted rules to protect the users and reduce the municipality's liability.

A few examples of these rules would be: No Glass containers allowed in park; Children less than 12 years of age must be supervised by an adult; No alcoholic beverages; No profanity. The municipality should establish their own set of rules to best suit the interest of the municipality and the patrons using the facilities.

### Inspection of Parks

The park maintenance crews shall check the parks everyday to ensure safety of equipment and cleanliness of the park's facilities and grounds and they should document these inspections and any problems found.

Crews should be especially observant of the following conditions:

A concern would be broken fencing materials, benches, tables, and signs on the playground. Ensure that Park Rules are posted, legible and very visible to all entering the park. Check for unlevel walking areas. Include in this check, exposed tree roots and stumps, rocks, and equipment's exposed concrete footings. These are all potential trip/fall dangers. Survey the entire playground for debris such as: fallen tree limbs, broken bottles/glass, and overfilled refuse containers.

### Check Condition of Equipment

Check the playground equipment for Rust, Rot, Cracks, or Splinters especially where it comes into contact with the ground. Extended or protruding bolts and screws that are not protected by rubber caps. Inspect "see-saws" closely to ensure that partial car tires or some other shock absorbing material is embedded in the ground underneath the seats or secured on the underside of the seat itself. Check equipment to ensure that it is securely anchored and that all hardware is secure. This would include checking loose or worn fastening devices and connections such as "S" hooks. Look closely at moving components, like swing hangers and "merry-go-round" bearings to ensure that they are not worn. Ensure that there are no broken or missing components on any of the equipment. This would include: Handrails, guardrails, protected barriers, steps and rungs on the ladders.

### **Broken Equipment**

If broken equipment is detected during your inspection, it should be immediately repaired or removed. If removal of a piece of equipment is required, be sure to also remove the base and /or footings that it is mounted to and then level out the surrounding ground. This will ensure no trip/fall hazards are left behind.

### **Use Zones and Fall Heights**

The Use Zone is the surface under and around a piece of equipment onto which a child falling from or exiting from the equipment would be expected to land. There are specified standards for Use Zones as well as Fall Heights. Use Zones are a minimum of six feet in all directions of playground equipment. Some equipment requires larger areas of Use Zones, such as, Slides and Swings which is determined by the type and height of the equipment. Fall Heights is the vertical distance between the highest designated play surface on a piece of equipment and the protective surfacing beneath it.

### **Cushioning Material/Protective Surfacing**

Of utmost urgency is the presence of Cushioning or protective surfacing materials under and around the playground equipment. There are various types of materials that can be used such as: Sand, Treated wood fiber, wood chips, mulch, or mats made from safety tested rubber or rubber-like mats). Make sure that the material meets the type and depth requirements for each piece of equipment. In High Impact areas under swings, slides, merry-go-rounds, etc. these cushioning materials must be raked and leveled each day. Also, a daily check for foreign objects, sharps, and other debris is essential to providing for the safety of playground users.

### **Handicap Accessibility**

All playgrounds must be handicap accessible in accordance with the Americans With Disabilities Act. This includes parking, equipment, ramps, restrooms, water fountains and pathways. There are numerous rules and regulations regarding parks, playgrounds and swimming pools. This article refers only to a few examples to help you understand the importance of maintaining safe play areas for your municipality. For specific information regarding regulations and standards for parks, playground and swimming pools contact the Risk Management, Inc. Safety Staff.