

RISK COMMUNIQUÉ

Playground Safety

Playgrounds are great assets in a community. Besides providing opportunities for fun and exercise, they help children develop physically, socially, and intellectually.

Unfortunately, each year over 200,000 children head to the emergency room as a result of injuries on playground equipment, and over 75% of these injuries happen on public playground equipment. If your organization has a playground, VFIS would like to help you minimize these risks and keep your community's children healthy and safe.

Age-Appropriateness—First, in selecting playground equipment, bear in mind the age of the children who will be playing there. Locate equipment for very young children—ages 2–5—in a separate area, and make sure it offers additional support and safeguards. When choosing equipment, remember to accommodate children with disabilities as well.

Supervision—Children often use playground equipment in unanticipated ways. When adults supervise children, they can help protect them by identifying dangerous situations and intervening. Adults can also check for strings on clothing or unsecured ropes on equipment that can present hazards. Supervision is highly recommended.

Maintenance—Regular inspection of playground equipment and surface areas is another important way to ensure that children are kept safe. Using the attached checklist (or one found at www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/pubs/325.pdf, Appendix A), your designated maintenance person should go over each piece of equipment regularly and arrange for any needed repairs. Also, debris should be removed frequently.

Fall Surfacing—Most playground injuries —nearly 70 percent—are related to falls. This is why the ground surface is so important. Did you know that grass is no longer recommended as a surfacing material on playgrounds? Currently, experts recommend 12 inches of shock-absorbing material, such as hardwood fiber/mulch, sand and synthetic materials such as poured-in-place rubber mats or tiles. Concrete, asphalt, blacktop, packed dirt or rocks are no longer acceptable. At least the six-foot-square area surrounding each piece of equipment (the “use zone”) should contain the recommended surface material.

Remember, your efforts to minimize injuries, death, and losses make a significant difference. Beginning with these basic safeguards, make sure that your playground is as safe as you can possibly make it. For more detailed information and resources, go to www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/pubs/325.pdf.

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Playground Safety Checklist

Following is a generic checklist for playground equipment. Make sure that:

- Surface materials are appropriate and in good condition.
- Debris is picked up.
- Elevated equipment has guardrails.
- Spaces, including those between ladder rungs, do not measure less than 3.5 inches or more than 9 inches.
- No sharp points or edges protrude, and all “s” hooks are closed.
- Tripping hazards, such as tree roots, holes, sprinklers, or exposed footings, are eliminated.
- Play structures are adequately spaced.
- Equipment that may contain traces of lead paint is tested and remedied or removed.
- Benches and swing seats are in good condition.
- Climbing equipment is free of entanglement hazards.
- No piece of equipment is taller than 10 feet.
- There are no missing or broken rungs, nuts, bolts, etc.
- No standing water is present.
- Any cracks, frayed ropes, or rough edges are taken care of.
- Maintenance checks are routinely performed and repairs made.
- Playground rules are posted.

This checklist was prepared for you by VFIS, compiled from information provided by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (www.cpsc.gov) and the National Program for Playground Safety (<http://www.uni.edu/playground/>).

This is a sample guideline furnished to you by VFIS. Your organization should review this guideline and make the necessary modifications to meet your organization's needs. The intent of this guideline is to assist you in reducing exposure to the risk of injury, harm, or damage to personnel, property, and the general public. For additional information on this topic, contact your VFIS Risk Control Representative at (800) 233-1957.