

Safety & Risk Management Guide

6 Top Safety Factors to Consider When Designing a Playspace:

1. *Age-appropriate* play equipment- School-age children (ages 5 to 12) and preschool children (ages 2 to 5) have different play styles and abilities. So if you have users in both groups you want to provide separate play areas for each.
2. *Climate*- Depending on sun exposure you may want to have adequate shade provided by either built structures or shade from near-by vegetation. It is also important to have your playspace built on a well-drained site and separated from water or other natural hazards. If you get snow in the winter months you may want to consider play equipment that has more to do on upper levels so it can be used all year long.
3. *Access*- Be sure the playspace has strong sight lines for parents or teachers to keep an eye on children at all times, visible from nearby paths, and away from automobile and bicycle traffic.
4. *Equipment design*. Playground equipment should be structurally sound, durable and engineered with safety in mind.
5. *Layout of play area*. Consult with your Playground Guy Rep on creating a playspace that allows for maximum amount of users while minimizing traffic conflicts. If you are designing something yourself you may want to consult with a landscape architect or a professional designer.
6. *Protective surfacing*. Consult with your Playground Guy Rep on ensuring you use the adequate depth amount of loose-fill material, factory-made rubber tiles, or a combination of the two.

Equipment Selection

There are significant differences between brands of playground equipment. Some equipment such as custom-built wooden structures, may not meet safety standards at all. When specifying equipment, you should insist that the equipment conforms to the following:

- The Consumer Product Safety Commission's *Handbook for Public Playground Safety*;
- The ASTM F1487 *Standard Consumer Safety Performance Specification for Playground Equipment for Public Use*. All equipment should be certified to conform to this standard according to the procedures established by the International Playground Manufacturer's Association (IPEMA);
- Make sure the protective surfacing around the equipment has been tested by a third party according to the ASTM F1292 *Standard Specification for Impact Attenuation of Surfacing Materials within the Use Zone of Playground equipment*;



Installation

Site preparation and equipment installation should be handled by certified professionals. If it is conducted by volunteers ensure that a check is completed by a professional and signed-off before allowing anyone to use the equipment. The following conditions are met:

- The manufacturer provides detailed instructions on how to install the equipment. This should be in the form of a manual that has been customized for your specific equipment with a footing diagram
- If using professionals ensure to complete a check on everything installed with them once complete
- If using a volunteer crew or doing a community build your installation must be supervised and signed off by a manufacturer certified installer

Maintenance

Industry estimates blame poor maintenance for one-third of all playground injuries. By creating an effective maintenance plan upfront, you can minimize risk and maximize the lifespan of your investment. Here are the fundamentals to consider as you and your local Playground Guy build your custom maintenance plan.

High Frequency Maintenance:

- Pick up litter
- Sweep walkways
- Check potential wear points and mechanisms with movement
- Inspect and tighten hardware connections
- Level and replace displaced loose-fill surfacing
- Loosen compacted surfacing

Low-Frequency Maintenance:

- Plan to have a detailed, thorough safety audit and inspection of your playground's structural integrity performed at least once a year by experienced, trained personnel. Your Playworld Systems representative can provide you with local resources and consultation.
- Maintain records. Being able to show who did the inspections, when they were performed, what the results were, and what repairs were made can be important when you're faced with a possible lawsuit.
- A safety audit of all your playgrounds to ensure compliance with current ASTM, CPSC and ADA guidelines. Whenever possible, have such audits performed by a staff member or outside consultant who has completed the National Playground Safety Institute's Certified Playground Safety Inspector training.

Our manufactures help too by providing custom maintenance program, tailored to the specific components of your playspace. Playworld Systems Inc. for example provides the following with installation of any Playmakers®, Challengers®, LifeTrail®, NEOS® or Climbing Boulders™ playystems:

- Personalized equipment maintenance program on CD-ROM;
- Graffiti remover;
- Touch-up materials, including primer, spare paint, and sandpaper;
- Basic replacement parts.



Safety Responsibilities

When playground safety is a team effort, it starts at the earliest design stages and continues through the playground's day-to-day operation.

The site planner is responsible for:

- Selecting age-appropriate equipment and resilient surfacing;
- Allowing circulation patterns around and through the equipment to prevent traffic conflicts;
- Planning for access, drainage, shade, visibility and other factors;
- Soliciting input from children, parents, professionals and others who have an interest in the playground's safety and success.

The manufacturer is responsible for providing:

- Equipment that conforms to American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM), Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other recognized safety and accessibility standards;
- Clear and concise installation instructions;
- A step-by-step maintenance program;
- Product liability insurance to protect the playground's owner against lawsuits that result from equipment failure.

The installer is responsible for:

- Installation according to the manufacturer's recommendations;
- Insurance coverage on the work performed.

The playground operator (e.g., a park department, school or school district) is responsible for:

- Identifying the age range of the intended users;
- Supervision of the playground, when appropriate;
- Posting safe-use instructions, when appropriate;
- Following the manufacturer's instructions for maintaining the equipment;
- Safety inspections (periodic);
- Repairs.

Parents and other adults on the playground are responsible for:

- Supervising children to assure safe play;
- Ensuring users follow instructions;
- Mediating conflicts that occur between different children or age groups.