

SAFETY MATTERS

RISK MANAGEMENT NEWSLETTER

IN THIS ISSUE

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PLAYGROUND SAFETY

OBJECTIVE To learn how to prevent hazards that can be found on playgrounds.

Although it is important to provide children with the opportunity for outdoor play and exercise, playgrounds can be associated with major liability issues if they are not properly maintained. An old, poorly maintained playground usually does more harm than good. There are over 220,000 estimated playground-related injuries each year. Almost 80% of these injuries are caused by falls, and more than half of the total injuries involve children ages 5-9.

There are currently no federally mandated regulations for playground safety. This has been addressed at the state level, and lawmakers have passed legislation to address playgrounds. The National Recreation and Park Association is the industry's leading provider of voluntary playground safety standards and guidelines.

HAZARDS

General hazards that should be avoided on playgrounds:

- **Crush and shearing points:** Anything that could crush or shear limbs should not be accessible to children on a playground. Look out for equipment that a child could likely get a body part stuck inside, and consider the closing force of that piece of equipment.





- **Entanglement and impalement:** Projections on playground equipment should not be able to entangle clothing, as this could lead to strangulation. Projections should also not be able to impale a child. Figure 1 below demonstrates an entanglement hazard where a clothing item, such as a drawstring of a jacket, can become entangled in the piece of equipment. Figure 2 below shows a hazardous projection that can lead to impalement.

Figure 1

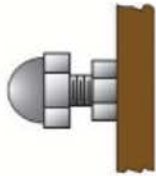
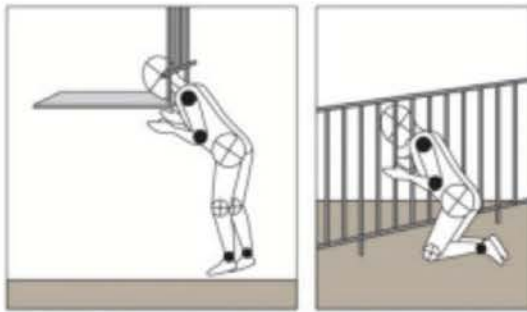


Figure 2



- **Entrapments:** Openings in portions of playground equipment should be less than 3.5 inches wide or greater than 9" to prevent head entrapment if the child enters the opening either feet or headfirst. See figure below.



- **Sharp points, corners, and edges:** These pose the risk of puncturing a child and can cause serious lacerations if protective measures are not taken.
 - Any exposed equipment ends should be covered by caps or plugs
 - Wood parts should be smooth and free from splinters
 - All corners should be rounded
- **Suspended hazards:** Children may be injured if they run into or trip over suspended components (cables, wires, or ropes) connected from one piece of the playground equipment to another.

- **Tripping hazards:** Playground areas should be free from tripping hazards on both the equipment as well as the surfacing. This can include hidden changes in elevation and deteriorating playground surfaces.

PLAYGROUND SURFACING

The surfacing under and around the playground equipment is a key factor in reducing the likelihood of serious and life-threatening head injuries for children. It is always suggested that a shock-absorbing surface is selected to protect against these injuries. It is also important to ensure the surface is adequately maintained to avoid potential tripping hazards.

Recommended Surfacing	Inappropriate Surfacing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rubberized mats/tiles • Pea gravel • Shredded/recycled rubber mulch • Engineered wood fiber • Wood chips or wood mulch • Sand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asphalt • Concrete • Dirt • Grass • Chromated Copper Arsenate (CCA) treated wood mulch

MAINTAINING A PLAYGROUND

Inadequate maintenance of playground equipment can result in unwanted hazards and injuries. The manufacturer's maintenance instructions and recommended inspection schedules should always be strictly followed. A comprehensive maintenance program should be developed to address all playground equipment, as well as the playground surfacing. The play structures should be inspected for excessive wear, deterioration, and other hazards. Records of all inspections should be maintained, and deficiencies should be repaired and/or otherwise addressed immediately. Any incident that occurs on the playground must be followed up with an adequate investigation to ensure compliance, and to identify areas in need of improvement and/or safety upgrades.





The inspection should focus on hazard identification and should occur on a monthly basis. Depending on the local climate, there may be times when the playground is more heavily used, and therefore would need more frequent inspections. A suggested routine playground inspection should look for the following hazards:

- Broken equipment, loose bolts, missing caps, cracks in equipment, etc.
- Worn, loose, damaged, or missing parts
- Rusted metals or rotted equipment
- Hazardous or dangerous debris
- Problems with surfacing
- User modifications (equipment rearranged, ropes tied to parts of equipment, etc.)
- Broken glass and other trash or debris
- Vandalism

POSTING RULES

Playground rules should be posted in the area to provide clear expectations and guidelines on proper use of the equipment. Although playground rules may need to be customized, the following are suggestions on what to include:

- Hours of operation
- This playground is for use for children, ages X to X
- Adult supervision required for all children under X years old
- Absolutely no running, pushing, shoving, or rough play
- Appropriate footwear must be worn at all times
- No glass or food in the play area
- No littering or loitering
- Report any damages or defects immediately to the office

Resources

National Recreation and Park Association – 12-Point Playground Safety Checklist

This California Schools JPA fact sheet is not intended to be exhaustive. The discussion and best practices suggested herein should not be regarded as legal advice. Readers should pursue legal counsel or contact their insurance providers to gain more exhaustive advice.

ACTIVE SUPERVISION

Each unique playground requires a specialized supervision plan, based on its setting and equipment. A Playground Supervision Plan helps ensure safety and positive play experiences.

Each playground supervisor should be assigned a specific area to monitor. These areas may include, play structures, blacktop areas, and grass. Supervisors should:

- Carefully monitor the area without disrupting play.
- Stay in motion, stand – don't sit, to ensure children's safety in each play setting.
- Avoid distractions like phones and talking to other adults
 - Don't Cluster together with other monitors
- Have a full understanding of the playground and facility
- Build trust and respect of the children around you
 - Be a good role model
 - Follow the same rules set for the kids around playground safety
 - Encourage kids to practice playground safety themselves





SIGN-IN SHEET

PLAYGROUND SAFETY

Facilitator: _____ Facilitator's Signature: _____

Date: _____ Organization: _____ Department: _____

Participants:

Name: _____	Signature: _____
Name: _____	Signature: _____
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