

HOW SAFE IS YOUR PLAYGROUND?

By Bill Balmat

Spring is in the air! We've already set our clocks ahead an hour due to 'day light savings time'. And as the winter thaw begins, children will be playing outside longer and returning to the playgrounds and parks for fun and games. Is your park safe? How has the playground equipment held-up under the severe winter weather conditions? What do you plan to do to provide a safe park and playground environment?

Did you know that the National Recreation and Park Association estimates that over 205,800 park-related injuries occur every year, and about 15 children die each year because of playground incidents. Have you had any injuries reported recently in your playgrounds? Or do you have an accident waiting to happen?

Following are examples of some of the more severe playground related injuries that have occurred recently:

- An s-hook on a swing letting go and a 14 year old girl fell on her head. There was no safe fall material under the swing, only grass and hard packed earth. The girl suffered a severe brain injury and has already undergone multiple surgeries.
- A child cut his leg at the bottom of a slide where the metal had come apart and left an exposed edge that sliced his leg from the ankle to the knee.
- A child was running and holding on to a merry-go-round, when he slipped and fell and was literally dragged under the merry-go-round suffering multiple lacerations, cuts and bruising.



Do these hazards or others await children who will be using your parks and playgrounds?

Following are some suggested actions that you can take to provide a safe and successful playground for children:

- Make sure that your playground meets appropriate safety requirements. The Handbook for Public Playground Safety, published by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) can be found @ www.cpsc.gov.
- When purchasing new or replacement equipment, have it installed by a qualified installer. Do not try and do it yourself or use local volunteers.
- Install and Maintain sufficient safety surfacing under ALL playground equipment!
- Perform an annual safety inspection of your outdoor play areas. In this geography, spring time would be the most logical time to conduct this activity.
- Establish an effective and repeatable maintenance inspection program. Throughout the year you should be conducting inspections of all parks, playgrounds, equipment and playing fields at regular intervals.
- Utilize inspection checklists to assist you with these on-going maintenance inspections AND retain this documentation for future reference. Accurate maintenance records are vital!
- Be prepared to remove broken equipment that might be too costly to replace or repair. Just because it is broken, doesn't mean that a child will stop using it.
- Do not forget or overlook good health and sanitation practices at your parks and playgrounds.

These are but a few of the steps that can be taken to help prevent and minimize injuries at playgrounds. Accidents will happen – but you do NOT want to be identified as the cause of an injury occurring when an 'ounce' of prevention could have prevented it.

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