



Safe Schools Agenda

Volume 11, Issue 5

May 2004

Route to:

Superintendent
 School Business Off.
 Athletic Director
 Supt. Bldgs/Grounds
 Site Administrators
 Transportation Dir.
 Lunch Director
 Classroom Teachers

A monthly service provided to help you with your efforts to make your school safe for students, staff and the public

Auditing Your Playground Safety Program

When we initiated the Safe School Agenda some ten years ago, one of our objectives was to provide a monthly reminder of safety issues. Our other main objective was to “keep safety on the agenda” by providing safety awareness in an easily digestible and usable format. In that vein, spring brings us once again to the topic of playground safety.

Take note of the following statistics gathered by the Consumer Product Safety Commission: (based on emergency-room injury treatments only, so this is a conservative number)

- Each year, about 205,860 children receive emergency-room care for injuries that occur on playground equipment
- 76% of the injuries happen on public playground equipment
- 45% of injuries involving public equipment occur in schools
- From January 1990 to August 2000, CPSC received reports of 147 deaths of children that involved playground equipment
- 70% of those deaths occurred at home; 30% occurred on public equipment
- Most injuries on public playground equipment were associated with climbing equipment (53%), swings (19%), and slides (17%)
- The major cause of injury was falls
- The major cause of death was strangulation

- The financial cost of treatment of these injuries in emergency rooms was about \$1.2 billion.

Injuries on public property bring about charges of negligence, liability lawsuits, and increases in property and casualty premiums. The last time these premiums took a dramatic jump, many schools abandoned their elementary playgrounds, stopped buying and/or maintaining their equipment, and in so doing, deprived students of important tools in developing their social, physical, and imaginative skills. Don't let that happen in your school. Conduct an audit of your playground safety program and follow up on it so that you and your insurance carrier are confident that your safety program is working to reduce existing hazards and lower the chance of serious injury and/or death.

Steps in Performing Your Annual Playground Safety Audit

1. Add these references on standards and guidelines to your library:
 - Standard F1487-01, American Society for Testing and Material, (610) 832-9500. www.astm.org.
 - Handbook for Public Playground Safety, U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission. (800) 638-2772. www.cpsc.gov.
 - ASTM/CPSC Playground Audit Guide, Playground Systems. (800) 233-8404. www.playworldsystems.com.

visit our website at www.nysgroup491.com

Email: info@nysgroup491.com

Program Administrator: Professional Underwriters, 1-800-833-8822



Steps...cont'd.

- Playword Systems. (800) 233-8404. Playground Safety is No Accident, Second Edition, National Recreation and Park Association. (703) 858-2148. www.nrpa.org.
2. Collect data on playground injuries and insurance claims resulting from those injuries.
 3. Go over the data with your superintendent to make sure that he/she is in full support of protecting children and the district through a proactive safety program. The program will fail without such support.
 4. Perform a comprehensive audit of all playground equipment. Note site location, description, component material, serial number, manufacturer, age and condition. Note type and condition of ground-surface material. Make sure that playgrounds meet requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act.
 5. Prioritize the hazards you find as:
 - Life-threatening
 - Potential for serious injury
 - Potential for less serious injury
 6. Take equipment which does not meet standards, or which you find to be life-threatening or a potential for serious injury, out of service immediately.
 7. Make timely repairs on all other equipment.
 8. Because falls are the major cause of injuries, give top priority to the condition and depth of surface materials under equipment. See "Critical Heights...of Tested Materials" in ASTM F1292.
 9. With information from your audit, create specialized inspection forms which reflect the equipment on each playground, using samples in the reference guides as starters.
 10. Establish a schedule of routine maintenance and inspection. Assign responsibility for inspections and follow-up. There should be daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly and random inspections in your plan.
 11. Post signs which specify the appropriate age range of children using that equipment.
 12. Prepare an emergency preparedness checklist so that supervisors will be prepared and equipped to handle emergencies when they arise.
 13. Post signs with clear, concise rules for use of the equipment. If the site is open to the general public, require that adult supervision be provided for younger children. The rules should state that the school is not liable for injuries sustained during non-school use. This may discourage claims. (However, this will definitely not protect the district from a claim based on poor maintenance of the play areas.)
 14. Set up a calendar to follow up on inspections and work orders.
 15. Set up training sessions for all personnel involved in maintaining playgrounds. Provide a written program, forms and schedules. Sensitize staff to the potential for injury to students and the importance of keeping inspection schedules and documenting them.
 16. Set up training sessions for playground supervisors. Provide specific instructions and forms for daily inspections of equipment and surfaces, guidelines for proper use of equipment and conduct in the playground area. Require active supervision at all times.
 17. Provide lesson plans for classroom teachers, physical education teachers and playground supervisors to use with children.
 18. Keep all records of the playground safety program in one place. They will provide a substantial defense for the district in the event of a claim of negligence.