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A TRUST BUILT FOR STUDENTS

PLAYGROUND SAFETY

QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

Each year, roughly 200,000 kids are treated for playground-related injuries. Although “kids will be kids,” you can take precautions to protect both students from unnecessary injuries and the district from claims and lawsuits. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission publishes the “Handbook for Public Playground Safety” that outlines basic equipment and layout recommendations designed to provide a play environment least likely to cause injuries. These guidelines are based on voluntary [ASTM F1487-17](#) standards that govern technical playground design for manufacturers, architects and designers.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

PROVIDE ADEQUATE SHOCK-ABSORBING MATERIALS – Both unitary (poured in place and other solid, stationary materials) and loose fill materials can provide adequate shock absorbency. Recommended loose fill materials include wood chips, double-shredded bark mulch, engineered wood fibers, fine or coarse sand, fine or medium gravel, and shredded tires. Depending on the height of play equipment, surfaces should have a consistent 9”-12” of shock-absorbing material.

ESTABLISH FALL ZONES – Each piece of stationary equipment should have a radius of six (6) feet around it in all directions that is free of ground hazards and covered with sufficient shock-absorbing materials. When fall zones overlap due to space constraints, there should be a minimum of nine (9) feet between structures over 30” tall. Swing sets are the exception to the six-foot recommendation; their fall zone should extend two times the height of the swing fulcrum in front and behind the swing’s center.

MAINTAIN SAFE HARDWARE – Equipment should be checked for extensive wear and tear, protruding bolts and pinch points. Chains should not have open “S” hooks and should be replaced when there is 50-percent wear of the chain’s gauge. Nuts, bolts and support bars should be as flush to the play surface as possible.

ELIMINATE ENTANGLEMENT AND ENTRAPMENT – Any protruding item which may be able to catch children’s clothing or strings can be an entanglement hazard. These openings or snags should be filled in or made flush with their surrounding surface. Any opening greater than 3½” but less than 9” could entrap a child’s head, arm or leg and should also be eliminated.

CONDUCT MONTHLY INSPECTIONS – One of the most effective safeguards is for districts to document monthly equipment inspections. This will assist the district to quickly identify any hazards arising from normal wear and tear, and also document when the hazards are identified and mitigated. A sample monthly checklist is available through the CPSC or by contacting the PACE Risk Management Department at 800-285-5461.

This **QUICK REFERENCE** provides a very brief overview of public playground safety.

The U.S. CPSC’s [Handbook for Public Playground Safety](#) is available on their website for downloading and printing.

PACE RISK MANAGEMENT

800-285-5461 • PACE.OSBA.ORG • RISKMANAGEMENT@SDAO.COM