

Information Sheet Number 1

Accidents on Children's Playgrounds

Introduction

It is estimated that there are approximately 40,000 injuries to children on playgrounds each year which result in a hospital visit.

The accident statistics show that injuries as a result of accidents occur for several reasons

Management Causes

- poor equipment design or failure to comply to Standards
- poor design and layout
- unsuitable equipment for the intended age group
- incorrect installation
- poor inspection
- poor maintenance

User Causes

- lack of supervision
- 'misuse' of equipment
- unsuitable clothes
- weather conditions

Types of Accidents

Not all accidents are related to the equipment - perhaps as few as 40% - and of these 80% result in a fall to the surface. Of the remaining accidents, at least 4% involve children being struck by a swing seat (although the resultant injury is usually not serious), a similar number being bitten by dogs and being cut by glass.

Of the equipment involved in fall injuries the figures suggest these percentages:

- Swings 40%
- Climbers 23%
- Slides 21%
- Roundabouts 5%
- See-Saws 4%
- Fireman's Poles 1%
- Others 6%

This does not mean swings are more dangerous - just that there are more of them and they are more popular. One of the most dangerous items on the playground are overhead bars which rotate.

Playground Law

Playground Managers may be sued for negligence if they fail to take reasonable care to ensure their playgrounds are safe and avoid accidents they could reasonably have foreseen would happen. An example would be an accident which occurred from failing to maintain the protective surface which had been provided under equipment.

Acts of Parliament which cover children's playgrounds include:

- Occupier's Liability Act (1957)
- Health and Safety at Work etc. Act (1974)
- Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (1999)

Playground Standards

The main standards are EN1176 covering equipment, and EN1177 covering surfacing.

Improving Children's Playgrounds (providers)

1. Obtain professional design and layout advice.
2. Select equipment and surfacing which meets the Standards.
3. Ensure it is installed by a competent person in accordance with EN1176.
4. Have a post-installation inspection carried out by an independent body.
5. Inspect the playground and equipment regularly:
 - Weekly
 - Quarterly
 - Annually
6. If you are carrying out inspections, find a training course. The annual inspection should be carried out by an independent specialist.
7. Have an effective maintenance programme which repairs faults quickly.
8. Have a programme for improving and up-dating playgrounds.

Improving Playground Safety (users)

1. Check the playground and report anything you see wrong.
2. Press the playground manager (often the local authority) to improve the playground

Further Reading and Information

Assessing Risk on Children's Playgrounds (3rd Edition), RoSPA
Guide to the European Playground Equipment and Surfacing Standards, (4th Edition), RoSPA

Routine Inspection of Playgrounds, RoSPA

Developing the Children's Playground – A Basic Management Guide, RoSPA

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