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Inspecting Your Playgrounds for Safety

Playgrounds should balance injury prevention with the desire to promote children's ability to test their limits, build muscle, gain confidence, and learn personal interaction. In 2013, among children less than 10 years of age, [there were 3,970 visits to emergency departments](#) for injuries associated with playground equipment, yet many of these injuries are avoidable. As the number of injuries increases, it is important for public entities to design, build, and maintain playgrounds to better promote safety.

RMA Insurance is proud to announce that our Risk Advisor team are Canadian Playground Safety Institute (CPSI) certified inspectors. With this certification, our team can now inspect your playgrounds to ensure that they are compliant with current CPSI code as an additional free service for our members. Once completed, the risk advisors can also provide risk mitigation advice, along with information on weekly and monthly inspection checklists to identify any areas that may need addressing.

There are many risks that public entities should be aware of before installation of equipment and during inspections. At a minimum, inspections should take place during equipment installation and on an annual basis. More frequent inspections may be necessary for popular playgrounds with high levels of usage.

There are some specific things that you should consider keeping on your radar for inspection.

Non-Compliant/Old Equipment

Before and after installing any piece of equipment that has been gifted to you, check with the CPSI to ensure it is safe and compliant with the standard. If an installed piece is later ruled dangerous or non-complaint, it should be removed immediately.

Splash Pads

Splash pads are a popular new addition popping up at many public parks. But there are a few items to keep in mind prior to considering installation.

- ◆ **Surface Safety:** Choose a surface that provides enough friction to reduce slipping. Be proactive about cleaning and disinfecting the surface to minimize the formation of algae, mold, or bacteria.
- ◆ **Water Safety:** There are many guidelines and recommendations established by Alberta Health Services. Following these guidelines will help combat waterborne illnesses and ensure the splash pad is a safe and clean place to play.
- ◆ **Slide Safety:** While there are currently no guidelines for slides at a splash pad park, if opting to include a slide, it should meet the standards of a slide installed at a regular park. This includes, but is not limited to, placing railings and a mat at the bottom of the slide.

Trip Hazards

During all inspections, be sure to check for trip hazards including rocks, wood chips on the sidewalk, tree limbs, or exposed footings.

Fall Hazards/Railings

Falls are the most common cause of injury, representing nearly half of all playground accidents. Installing and maintaining guardrails on elevated equipment will help prevent falls. If a piece of equipment lacks a rail at an

elevated surface, do not hesitate to contact the manufacturer to add one. Soft rubber surfaces may also reduce cuts, scrapes, and other injuries resulting from a fall on a harder surface.

Choking and Entanglement Hazards

To avoid risks like choking or entanglement, ensure bolts, hooks, and projections have minimal exposure. It can be extremely easy for a child's clothing to become entangled on playground equipment. Consider signage that encourages the removal of jewelry, jackets, or clothing with drawstrings that could cause choking or entanglement. Railings to prevent falls should also have bars spaced close enough to prevent children from sticking their heads through the bars and getting stuck.

Equipment Spacing

Playground equipment should be installed with a fall zone in mind. A fall zone extends six feet beyond the equipment. A proper fall zone prevents children from coming into contact with another piece of equipment if a fall does occur. Hitting another piece of equipment can increase the severity of the injury caused by the initial fall.

Signs

Signs should be posted in areas visible to equipment users and caregivers. Signs should provide guidance on the age appropriateness of the equipment. Other signage you may want to consider includes supervision and warnings for hard or hot surfaces. Taking the time to proactively safeguard your community's playground for the users will also help protect your public entity's finances. Documenting inspections and any repairs on equipment or grounds will demonstrate your attempt to operate in a reasonable manner.

Please reach out to the team of RMA Risk Advisors below for any questions or inspection requests.

Mark Sosnowski, CIP

Risk Advisor

780.446.6346

mark@RMAinsurance.com

Chris Dyer

Risk Advisor

403.998.8842

chris@RMAinsurance.com

Vay Diep

Risk Advisor

780.446.2353

vay@RMAinsurance.com

Temí Alao

Risk Advisor

587.599.3370

temi@RMAinsurance.com