

Playground Surfacing

When is certified surfacing required?

All playground equipment with a fall height over 500mm above ground level must have a certified impact absorbing surface beneath and around it to help prevent serious head or other injury.

Impact absorbing surfaces must comply with the AS/NZS 4422:1996. Many impact absorbing materials have been extensively tested for impact attenuation. No one material has proven to be the best solution for all occasions and decisions must be made depending on environmental conditions, cost and preference. All surfaces have advantages and disadvantages that need to be considered. The two main types of materials are loose fill and solid materials.

Loose Fill

Loose fill includes products such as bark mulch, wood chips, wood fibre, rubber mulch and sand. The cushioning effect of loose materials is achieved by the trapping of air between particles. This material is cheaper than solid products but requires regular maintenance including top up. However, if the cost of maintenance is measured in economic terms, more durable material could compare favourably.



The depth of loose fill must be maintained at a minimum depth of **250mm** at all times. AS/NZ 4486.1 suggests that materials should be raked and redistributed weekly and replenished four times a year.

The *Kidsafe NSW* Playground Advisory Unit recommends that a minimum depth of **300mm** be maintained to allow for product loss as children use the playspace. Loose materials are easily displaced and should be retained by a border or edge that is constructed with an appropriate material and avoids presenting any trip hazards.

Sand as playground surfacing is a popular alternative, however, must comply with the Australian Standard. Each sand type varies and may have differing depth requirements. Check with the supplier for documentation on specified depths for sand.



Fixed Surfaces

Includes products such as synthetic grass, rubber tiles and wet pour rubber. The impact attenuating qualities of fixed materials varies according to the thickness of the layer and the composition of the material. Fixed surfaces work well in heavy traffic areas such as under swings and at the base of slides. This assists by reducing the amount of time spent replenishing the loose fill. If a rubber product is desired select a light color as this will absorb less heat.

Before purchasing playground surfacing material;

Ask the manufacturer for information on the "critical fall height" test results. Request a certificate of compliance as proof that the material supplied has been tested in accordance with the Australian/New Zealand Standard AS/NZS 4422:1996. Retain this certificate of compliance in your playground records. This is important for both loose and fixed playground surfacing materials.