



PLAYGROUND NEWS

Issue 15

Spring 2004



NEW PLAYGROUND STANDARD

It's arrived! The New Playground Standard **AS/NZS 4685:2004** has been released by Standards Australia.

The new playground standard is made up of six parts. The new standard supersedes previous standard AS/NZS 1924: 1981 Parts 1 & 2. For a period of twelve months both standards will be used to allow education processes and ensure that issues can be ironed out.

The first part contains the general requirements while the remaining 5 parts are dedicated to specific items namely swings, slides, runways, carousels and rocking equipment. Other changes include changes in the area of equipment separation and fall zone. There are also some dimensional changes. There are a number of new requirements.

A significant change relates to supervised early childhood settings and there are specific requirements for access, guarding and entrapment. The maximum free height of fall is 1.5m for supervised settings. Significant changes have also been made to safe fall zones, with a range of changes for equipment heights.

The good news is that help is at hand as briefing sessions will be available in mainland & territory capitals. These one day seminars facilitated by Standards Association of Australia will be presented by Margaret Cavanagh, Program Manager, Kidsafe Playground Advisory Unit and Dr David Eager, Senior Lecturer, University of Technology Sydney.

These dates for 2004 are:

Sydney 2nd December
 Brisbane 3rd December
 Melbourne 7th December
 Adelaide 8 December
 Perth 9 December
 Hobart 6 December
 Darwin 13 December

Training sessions will also be conducted in NSW regional areas by the Kidsafe PAU early next year. If you are interested in hosting a session and can arrange a group of 15 people minimum, please contact us to make a booking.

For details on briefing or training sessions please email us at:
kidsafe@chw.edu.au

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The New Playground Standard can be

obtained by contacting:

Standards Association of Australia

www.standards.com.au

ph: (02) 8206 6000

GPO Box 5420

Sydney NSW 2001

IT'S TIME TO SPRING CLEAN!

Maintenance of equipment is essential to ensure safety for children. The following is a guide for risk managing your play space.

It is important to note that inadequate or poorly maintained under surface is the most common non-compliance issue that is consistently identified in playground studies.

Organic Under Surfacing

- Check the depth of your organic under surfacing. The Standard states that mulches should be a minimum of 200 mm deep with an extra 50 mm for high wear areas—we suggest a minimum of 250 mm to 300mm as the material compacts and dissipates quickly.
- Top ups of organic soft fall for fall heights greater than 500mm should only be purchased from suppliers with certified product that meet the Australian Playground Standard AS/NZS 4422 :1996 who can supply a certificate of compliance. It is important that this certificate be kept on file for licensing and maintenance records. As a guide topping up needs to be checked quarterly especially around high use & compacted areas. When raking, take care to level the upper layer of soft fall only, avoid incorporating the underneath soil.
- In early childhood settings with children under 2 years of age it is recommended to avoid particle sizes that present a choking hazard ie. no smaller than a film canister.
- Watermarking of equipment to indicate depth: this is an easy way to check and maintain correct depth of under surfacing by spray painting a contrasting line on each structural post of your fixed playground equipment at the correct height (250 to 300 mm) above ground level. A yellow line tends to be the best colour as even when dirty it still shows up. Once the organic material is below this line it's time to top up with certified organic soft fall.

Synthetic Grass

This product is often overlooked for maintenance however it is important to check this product regularly to check it is securely fixed. Sand applied on top will increase the life span of the product by holding the synthetic grass to the ground, assisting drainage and keeping the pile upright.

Prior to topping up, the existing product should be checked for wear and tear and any organic matter, algal or leaf matter removed as these can trap runoff water and prevent drainage.

Synthetic grass can be prepared by sweeping, hosing or with a blower vacuum. Sand can then be topped up and swept in to an ideal depth of 2mm below the top of the blade.

Sandpits

It's time to top up when the sand level drops 100mm below the top edge of the brick course. Firstly, the sand should be raked over and turned to remove debris. The ideal sand to purchase for sandpits is that of beach origin (in preference to river or bush sand) as beach sand is finer, smoother and cleaner to play with. Additional maintenance advice is available on the Kidsafe fact sheet on Sandpits. A copy can be downloaded from our website at www.kidsafensw.org or phone for a copy.

Mulching

Playground garden beds and tree surrounds are prone to compaction from trampling feet. This reduces the air filled porosity of the soil and will stress established plants into decline, increase the likelihood of insect and disease attack and possible death.

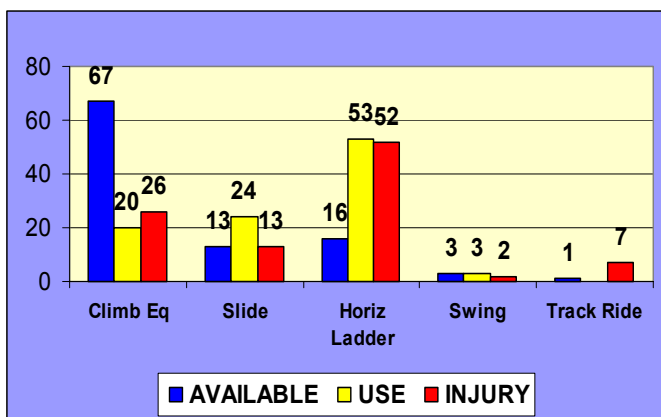
Wood mulches laid to a depth of 150mm will ensure good moisture retention, weed suppression and protection against compaction. Firstly, fork soil gently to aerate with care around root zones and fertilise beneath the mulch with blood & bone for great results. Keep deep mulch recessed from young plants.

WHAT IS THE PLAY EQUIPMENT OF CHOICE?

THE BRISBANE PLAYGROUND STUDY

Information in the last newsletter on safety surfaces under play equipment indicated that horizontal ladders produced more injuries than other pieces of play equipment. Given that so few under surfaces were either of adequate depth or of appropriate materials, and that horizontal ladders are generally some of the highest equipment, this result was not entirely unexpected. It is important to consider this piece of equipment in context as very little is known about what particular types of play equipment children chose to play on and how often they use them.

We observed children at play in 32 public parks and schools. We chose horizontal ladders, track rides, climbing equipment, slides and swings as these five types of equipment were most the commonly involved in injuries. What follows is a brief summary of our results and compares how much equipment was available for play, how heavily it was used, and what proportion that type of equipment contributed to injuries.



Schools:

Climbing equipment was the most commonly installed equipment, over two thirds of all equipment (67%), accounted for 20% of use, and 26% of the injuries in schools. Climbing equipment would seem to be under-used considering the amount of equipment available, and slightly over-represented in injuries.

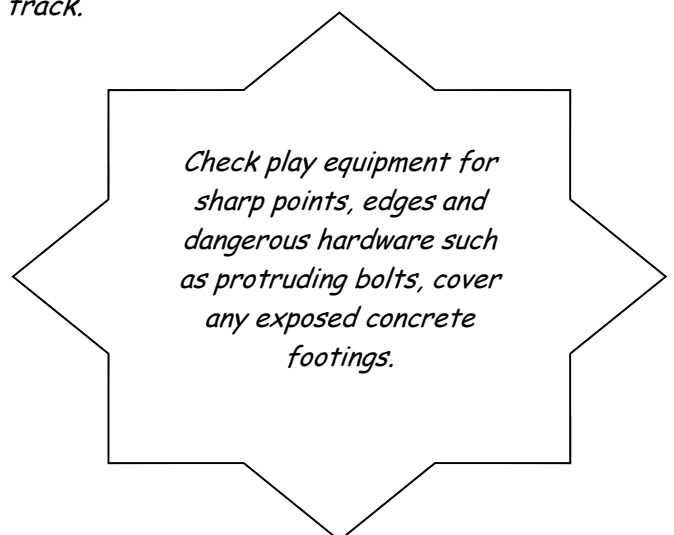
Horizontal ladders are very heavily used over half of the use (53%), and produced just over half (52%) of all injuries that is, the biggest single number of injuries. However, they were used more than twice as much as any other equipment.

Track rides are certainly popular and there was only one in our sample. We excluded the recently installed item to calculate our use-figures because it was used so heavily. The intensive use of equipment in schools may well be a factor in the greater number of injuries at that venue.

Definition of terms:

Horizontal ladders include monkey bars

Track rides are an item of children's play equipment where children can propel themselves along a track.



RESOURCES

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For PRESCHOOLS

KIDSAFE EARLY CHILDHOOD INFORMATION KIT

- Playground Fact Files
- Is It Safe? Booklet
- Concept Designs for Early Childhood Services
- "Keeping It Safe" Video
- Safety Inspection Checklists
- Site Inventory Forms

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(ends December 2004)

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FAQ'S

-When does the new Playground Standard become effective?

The new Standard is now effective as the Standard has been published. However, the new and old Standards will be used side by side for 12 months. The official launch of the new Standard will occur in December 2004.

-How does the new Standard effect my playground?

Everyone needs to become familiar with the new Standard as soon as possible and any new works completed in your playground must now comply with the new Standard.

NEXT ISSUE:

New swing safety standards

Shade for play spaces

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