

## Is Your Playground Safe?

Every day in the US nearly 500 children are sent to emergency rooms because of injuries sustained on playgrounds! Kids hurt themselves falling off slides and structures, colliding with moving pieces of equipment or other children on swings, and catching their clothing on equipment. Children also hurt themselves in ways we cannot predict or foresee. Research shows the most dangerous pieces of playground equipment are swings, monkey bars, climbers and slides. Of course accidents will happen, but simple steps you take today can go a long way in providing a safe play area for your most precious resource: your children!

Building and managing a well-designed playground can be fun. Think of yourself as a kid again! When designing a playground consider these issues first:

- Choose a location that is not close to a street, wooded area, pond and/or parking lot. Landscape around your playground using fences and/or shrubbery which will work well in designating the space and can help keep children safe.
- Ensure that the flooring of the playground reduces the effects of a fall rather than worsens it. Woodchips can help cushion a fall, as can rubber, sand or pea gravel. All have various benefits and costs associated with them, but they are much better choices than hard surfaces such as grass, concrete and asphalt. Make sure you have a depth of at least 12 in. of the material chosen. Another alternative is to use safety mats made of safety-tested rubber or rubber-like materials.
- Consider designing a play space that can work for 6 to 10-year olds as well as toddlers. But make sure the equipment is grouped by the different age groups. Also think about where the adults will be while the children are playing. Make sure the design allows the adults to see the children no matter where they are playing. Enclosed structures like forts may seem like a good idea for a backyard playground, but consider the practicality of one in your environment.
- When choosing equipment, the play space should extend a minimum of 6 ft. in all directions, from all equipment. When installing swings, the surface around swings should extend twice the height of the suspending bar in both the front AND rear of the swing. Any play structure taller than 30 in. should be spaced at least 9 ft. from other play structures. Equipment with open spaces that could trap children, such as openings in guardrails or between ladder rungs, should measure less than 3.5 in. or more than 9 in.

Now that your playground is built, you will want to manage the safety and maintenance of the space. Please see the Playground Safety Checklist (PDF in the Loss Prevention area under Checklists) which can be used annually. Keeping the installation, maintenance and safety manuals as well as any receipts in a book with this list checked and dated each year will go a long way in ensuring your children's safety!