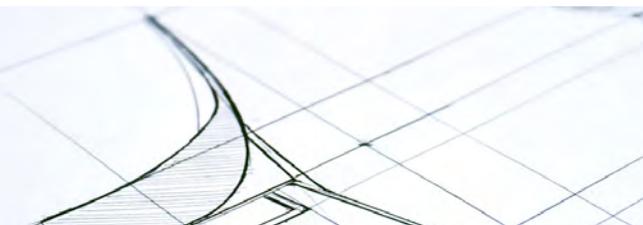


PLAYGROUND INSPECTIONS AND AUDITS GUIDE





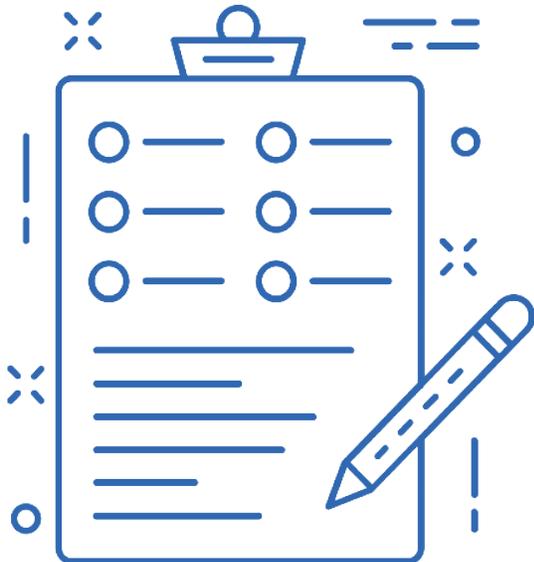
Introduction

When you think of a playground, what comes to mind? For many, a playground is a safe, fun environment in which kids socialize and play with their friends without worry. Kids make memories on playgrounds every day, and while it's impossible to guarantee the safety of every child who steps foot on your playground, it's nonetheless incumbent upon playground managers to ensure the overall safety and security of their playground as much as they can.

Even the most meticulously maintained playground can become unsafe in as little as a day, which makes regular inspections all the more important for playground managers. The more playgrounds you manage, the more inspections should be performed, and any new playground you open should also have an audit done to ensure everything is properly installed and in good working order. The aim of this guide is to define and describe what specifically playground inspections and audits entail.

Playground Inspections

According to the National Playground Safety Institute, a playground inspection is a systematic assessment that seeks to find common playground problems like equipment breakage, wear and tear, litter, and other common irregularities. Inspections should be conducted on a regular basis, and should incorporate both low-frequency and high-frequency inspections. Inspections are often carried out by certified playground safety inspectors (or CPSIs for short), but, with the proper knowhow, playground operators and their employees should be able to do it themselves. Factors that affect frequency of inspections include type of equipment, type of surfacing, as well as environmental issues such as climate and proximity to the ocean.



Playground Inspection Checklist

From swing sets to slides, it's prudent to ensure that playground equipment is safe for kids to play on. Even when moving equipment is in good condition, it's not at all uncommon for kids to fall off, which makes it all the more vital to check for worn chains and bearings to avoid compounding the severity of inevitable falls. When it comes to stationary equipment, playground managers should keep an eye out for exposed metal or plastic, especially in places where they could be hazardous.

The following are some problems to be on the lookout for when conducting playground inspections. Ranging from Priority A, the most urgent, to Priority C, the least urgent, this checklist should give you a clearer idea of what you need to look for when inspecting your playground.

1. Inspection Checklist: Priority A

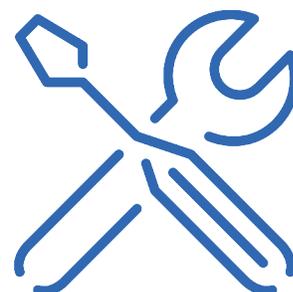
- No missing bolts, nuts, screws, etc. on any equipment (esp. swing sets and spinners).
- No significant rust or corrosion on any equipment.
- No exposed metal or plastic on any equipment.
- Chains on swings aren't excessively worn.
- Chain connectors and chains on swings have free movement.
- Loose-fill surfacing is evenly spread with adequate depth.
- Border surrounding playground is intact and in good condition.

2. Inspection Checklist: Priority B

- Speed regulators on merry-go-rounds are intact and functional.
- No exposed mechanisms, junctions of moving parts.
- Moving parts are well lubricated, not excessively worn.
- Rubber sleeves of swings are in place, not excessively worn.
- Climbers show no sign of slipping or cracking.
- Climbers have no missing rungs.

3. Inspection Checklist: Priority C

- Welds on composite structures are intact with no cracks.
- No broken or missing parts on composite structures.
- Unitary surfacing is not excessively worn.
- All support/joints/anchors are intact and secure.
- No peeling or cracked paint on any equipment.



Playground Audits

A playground audit takes a comprehensive look at the initial installation of a playground to ensure its compliance with local and national safety standards, as well as to identify any potential hazards. Unlike inspections, audits are typically only conducted by a CPSI. The specialized knowledge and skills that CPSIs possess allow them to make use of tools like playground test gauges and probes to identify potential issues. CPSIs have the knowhow to identify playground hazards and to document their findings in a way that's clear and concise.

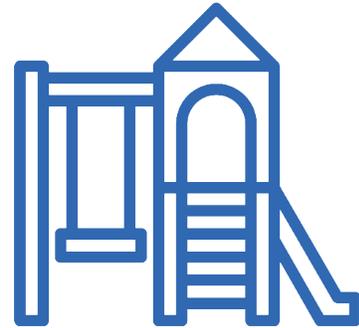
Why Have Your Playground Audited?

While some potential flaws on a playground are fairly easy to spot and subsequently address, others aren't as straightforward. One of the biggest reasons to get your playground audited by a CPSI is that they have the training and experience necessary to anticipate accidents and injuries before they occur. Don't make the mistake of simply assuming your playground was installed correctly; instead, enlist the help of a CPSI to make sure of it.

What Does a Playground Audit Entail?

First, CPSIs use probes of varying shapes and sizes to determine the risk of entrapment and/or entanglement on each piece of playground equipment. Since these tools are meant to replicate the shape and size of children's heads and torsos, CPSIs are able to identify potential safety risks far more effectively than an untrained pair of eyes. CPSIs also make use of protrusion gauges to identify problematic nails, bolts, handholds, etc. that could pose a risk to children at play.

Next, CPSIs will also assess the overall layout of your playground. One of the major aims of this is to promote proper traffic flow throughout your playground by ensuring adequate distances between each piece of playground equipment. While it's more or less inevitable that kids will bump into each other while running around on the playground, having properly-distanced equipment can substantially reduce the risk and frequency of this type of injury.



Lastly, CPSIs will hone in on your playground's surfacing. Proper depth is critical for loose-fill surfacing to mitigate the risk of injury from high falls, and with some basic digging and measuring tools, CPSIs are able to determine whether your playground surfacing is deep enough to guard against potential fall-related injuries.

For further details on getting your employees CPSI-certified, check out: <http://www.nrpa.org/CPSI/>



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CONCLUSION

Audits and inspections are essential for any playground manager that wishes to increase the longevity of their playground while safeguarding themselves and their organization against potential lawsuits when kids injure themselves while at play. It should also be noted, however, that injury isn't the only way for playground owners to be sued. If your playground doesn't adhere to the accessibility-related stipulations laid out in the Americans with Disabilities Act, special needs students and their parents are able to file a lawsuit against your organization under the ADA.

The inherent legal risk of having a non-ADA compliant playground makes audits and regularly-scheduled inspections all the more important. That said, a playground that's audited and frequently inspected is a safe playground, and a safe playground is one that kids and parents will want to return to time and time again.

OTHER HELPFUL RESOURCES

Resources available from your Landscape Structures representative:

ASTM F1487-07, Standard Consumer Safety Performance Specification for Playground Equipment for Public Use, American Society for Testing and Materials.

Handbook for Public Playground Safety , U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission.

Landscape Structures Inc. Safety Test Panel and training video.

Playguide™ Bulletin series on topics related to playground design and safety.

