

Does your playground make the grade?

By Carlene Brown

Whether it's the monkey bars, swings or slides, injuries are bound to happen on the playground. Each year over 200,000 children are injured on playgrounds. Of the children treated in U.S. emergency rooms for playground related injuries, most occur as a result of falls. In fact, 79% of the injuries are caused by falls which resulted in broken bones, bruises, cuts, and sprains.

Playground equipment and surfacing material have evolved over time. In order to prevent more serious injuries due to falls, hard surfaces such as concrete, asphalt and natural grass have been replaced with surfacing materials including, but not limited to engineered wood-fiber, poured-in-place, and synthetic grass. What many of us remember as jungle gyms or monkey bars have been replaced with innovative composite play structures and complex net and rock-climbers.

There are currently no federal laws governing playground safety. However, there are guidelines produced by the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) and standards established by the American Society of Testing and Materials (ASTM) which you will likely be held to in the event of a playground injury.

There are three essential elements to properly maintain a safe playground.

1. Professionally designed and installed play equipment that meets current CPSA and ASTM standards.
2. Provision of surfacing material in adequate amounts under and around play equipment.
3. Development and implementation of a routine inspection and maintenance program.

For more information on recommended controls for playground safety, signage, inspections and training, please see WCIA's playground equipment guideline, PAR.05, in the Liability Resource Manual. The Liability Resource Manual is available through the Member Resources page on the WCIA website: <http://www.wciapool.org/member-resources>. WCIA's Risk Management Reps are also available to answer questions, and to come out and take a look at your playground equipment. (You might even get them to go down the slide!)

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) offers an industry leading certification program in playground safety, the Certified Playground Safety Inspector (CPSI) program. Registration information and a full description of this course can be found on the NRPA website, nrpa.org.

The CPSI program trains individuals on the following: establishing an audit, inspection and maintenance program/procedures for playgrounds, identifying hazards on and around public playground equipment and ranking playground hazards according to injury potential.

The CPSI certification is valid for three years. Renewal every three years ensures that professionals are knowledgeable of the current best practices in the field of playground safety.

WCIA supports CPSI and will reimburse one CPSI registration and exam, per member, per year. Reimbursements are provided after the training has been completed and will require a copy of the invoice received from WRPA or NRPA as well as a certificate of completion. To obtain Reimbursement, go to WCIA's website wciapool.org, click on Education and then click on Training Reimbursements. Locate Certified Playground Safety Inspector-CPSI and follow the prompts. For questions on reimbursement please contact Member Services at memberservices@wciapool.org.