

## Playground Safety: A PMA Risk Control Bulletin

### Background

*In 1999 New Jersey adopted legislation to assure the safety of playgrounds used by the general public. This guide will serve as a reminder of the requirements of the law, and resources that can be accessed. Municipalities are encouraged to check their current equipment to assure that it is in compliance and that the playground experience of their residents is nothing but fun. As weather warms, it is the ideal time to check that the ravages of winter have not taken a toll on your equipment.*

The major requirement of the New Jersey Playground Safety Subcode N.J.A.C. 5:23- 11.1 is the adoption of the Consumer Product Safety Commission's Handbook for Public Playground safety. All member parks departments should have a copy of this text on hand. The manual can be downloaded at [www.cpsc.gov](http://www.cpsc.gov).

The National Recreation and Parks Association offers an excellent certification program for the inspection and maintenance of playground equipment. Visit [www.nrpa.org](http://www.nrpa.org) for details. To help prevent injuries from falls and other hazards on public playgrounds, the following safety tips are recommended:

- Never attach ropes, jump ropes, clotheslines, or pet leashes to the equipment. This can present a serious strangulation hazard to children.
- Post requirements that children remove their bike or other sports helmets before playing on the playground. Helmets can become entrapped in playground equipment, posing a strangulation hazard.
- Purchase playground equipment that meets the latest safety standards.
- Smooth sharp points or edges, and close open "S" hooks (should be open no more than the thickness of a dime) and cover protruding bolts. Use only manufacturer supplies components for repairs or maintenance.
- Check for openings in guardrails or between ladder rungs. Spaces should be either less than 3-1/2 inches or more than 9 inches so that they don't present an entrapment hazard.
- Post a requirement that adults supervise young children to make sure they are safe.
- Install and maintain at least 12 inches of wood chips, mulch, or shredded rubber (for equipment up to 8 feet high) or sand or pea gravel (for equipment no more than 5 feet high) as shock absorbing material under the playground. (Dirt and grass, which are the most prevalent surfaces under home playground equipment, do not adequately protect children from serious head injuries.) See the CPSC manual for a table of exact required surface depths.
- Install protective surfacing at least 6 feet in all directions from play equipment. For swings, the surface should extend, in back and front, twice the height of the suspending bar.

In addition to the Public Playground Handbook, CPSC also has an Outdoor Home Playground Handbook (PDF), a Home Playground Safety Checklist available in English and Spanish (both PDF), and a Neighborhood Safety Network poster (PDF) on playground safety.

Any questions or concerns should be directed to the Risk Control Team at PMA Insurance Group:

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