

Outdoor Play Equipment

Schools Safety Guide

Document information

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1. What is outdoor play equipment?

Outdoor play equipment is any fixed equipment children play on or interact with. Examples include: trim trails, swings, slides, roundabouts, climbing frames, rope nets, “pencils” (e.g. wooden posts) and rope swings.

2. Are there any recognised standards?

The recognised standard for playground equipment is BS EN 1176 (Playground Equipment and Surfacing). These standards have been adopted by the play industry as best practice and you should ensure that any new equipment you purchase is compliant with them.

3. Planning and installation

If you are considering installing outdoor play equipment you should ensure the following:

- The equipment and installation should be compliant with the BS EN 1176 standard.
- The equipment should have a post-installation inspection **and** risk assessment carried out by an independent (i.e. not the supplier/manufacturer) competent person (e.g. a member of the Register of Play Inspectors International [RPII]) **before** the equipment is brought into use.
- No playground equipment should be purchased without manufacturer instructions, details of inspection and maintenance requirements. A note should be kept of the age of the equipment and a special inspection carried out before the expiry of the warranty.

In addition, you should establish a regular maintenance and formal inspection regime to ensure the equipment remains safe to use.

4. Maintenance of equipment

When the equipment is installed, the installer/manufacturer should supply you with information on what regular maintenance it requires. Typically, this will include:

- Regular forking/filling of any loose-fill materials (e.g. bark, woodchip, sand, gravel).
- Treating and filling of any large cracks in wooden equipment.
- Making good (e.g. rubbing down) and painting/staining of surfaces.
- Lubrication of moving parts.
- Cleaning schedule.
- Security of fittings (i.e. ensuring screws, bolts, etc., are secure).

5. Inspection regime

There is no specific legal requirement to provide an inspection and maintenance programme, but the British Standards Institute, Health & Safety Executive, Insurers

and the major safety organisations recommend inspections as "good practice". Schools have a legal and moral responsibility of care to children using the equipment - and at the same time need to meet the expectations of the courts.

A regular series of inspections is recommended for children's playgrounds which include:

Routine inspection (visual)

This looks at the equipment's basic condition, especially faults due to recent vandalism, breakages and cleanliness of the playground. Inspections may be carried out locally by a manager or his/her staff and should be recorded on a simple sheet or book. Frequency of inspection should be daily when the school is open.

Operational inspection (termly)

A more detailed inspection of the equipment; provides a quality control check on the routine inspections and identifies certain types of minor wear and tear. These inspections should be carried out by a competent person, e.g. a trained member of staff or by an RPII member and should be recorded. Training courses are available from [RoSPA](#).

Annual inspection

Essentially this looks at vandalism, minor and major wear, long-term structural problems, changes in the Standards compliance and design practices, risk assessment, etc. This should be carried out by a specialist (e.g. RPII member) **not connected with** the playground operator or manager giving an independent written report of the site.

6. Play area surfacing

Protective surfacing on children's playground equipment is strongly recommended by safety organisations such as RoSPA, British Standards Institute and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). There is no doubt that head injuries to children are reduced in severity by the provision of protective surfaces, but such falls are a rare occurrence for children over five. It will not reduce accidents but may reduce the severity of injury from falls to the playground surface.

As a general principle there are three main types of protective surfacing for play areas:

- Grass - a good, all-purpose surface, but with little wear resistance or impact absorbency in dry conditions.
- Loose-fill materials - these include sand, wood products and pea shingle. They have good impact absorbency but disperse and break-down. They are not suitable for moving equipment.

- Synthetic surfaces – this includes tiles, wet-pour and layered. They are generally efficient, long-lasting and require some maintenance.

It is not necessary to provide a protective surfacing immediately for older equipment, but this should be considered as part of a planned programme of improvement.

All new equipment should be provided with an appropriate surface. Under 600mm high this need not be a protective surface but should have some impact attenuation. In some cases (e.g. Spring items) some ground protection may be required.

When purchasing surfaces, it is recommended that suppliers should give written assurance that their product has been tested in accordance with BS7188 and EN1177. Copies of appropriate test certificates should be obtained from suppliers. Schools can also obtain written assurance that the material will maintain its absorbency levels for the warranty period.

7. Risk assessment

Given the foreseeable risk of injury associated with outdoor play equipment, schools should carry out a simple risk assessment on its use. Issues covered in the assessment should include the installation, maintenance and inspection arrangements outlined above, and issues such as supervision, pupil ability, unauthorised use, and inclement weather considerations. A model risk assessment for you to adapt and adopt can be found on the [PPS webpage](#).

8. Further information

Please contact the health & safety unit if you require further information on outdoor play equipment.

Further information is also available on RoSPA's website:

<https://www.rospa.com/play-safety/advice>

A list of competent contractors who can carry out Operational and/or Annual inspections is available on the RPII website:

<https://www.playinspectors.com/inspectors.html>