



March 2016

Comprehensive Playground Inspection Programs

As spring approaches, it is a great time inspect playgrounds and to review your Playground Maintenance Program. A complete Program consists of visual inspections at three basic frequencies.

Annual Audit

A comprehensive playground risk management program starts with an annual audit. An audit consists of inventorying and examining each piece of playground and ancillary equipment, the park grounds and structures, and perimeter streets. We recommend pictures be taken to document the number and condition of each piece of playground equipment and surrounding areas.

Periodic (weekly to monthly) Inspections

Spring is the time to ramp-up the inspection program's frequency rate. The frequency of a playground's inspection is determined by several factors; season, how many children use it, harsh environments, neighborhood demographics, age of equipment, history of damage, and more. Owners of playground equipment should have a written policy that defines inspection frequency.

Use a checklist. A sample checklist is on the MEL website (www.njmel.org). A checklist offers the advantage of documenting what was inspected and found to be in satisfactory condition. Only reporting deficiencies leaves the worker who completed the report open to questions of what things were or were not inspected (months or years later). Remember the rule of documentation, "If it is not written down, it did not happen".

Daily Inspections

Workers are in the parks almost every day; cutting grass, picking up trash, or even just driving by on way to other assignments. Workers must be trained to visually check the playground equipment and grounds for obvious problems such as broken equipment, graffiti, etc. This quick check does not require paperwork, unless a deficiency is found. Workers should also be instructed to immediately correct conditions that can be fixed, or report conditions as soon as possible. Playground owners should also have a written policy on how workers are to document their corrective actions or reports.

Playgrounds will of course require maintenance and repairs from time to time. Even routine maintenance activities such as replenishing mulch or closing the gaps on S-hooks should be documented. Playground owners should have a 'paper trail' of work performed by employees. Repairs to playground equipment will also need to be documented. Repairs should be with manufacturer's parts. Hardware should be tamper-resistant.

Spring is also a good time to review your policies with employees who will be in and around playgrounds. Hold a Toolbox Talk to remind them how to record actions they took to immediately correct a deficient condition and how to report conditions that will need to be repaired by others. A Toolbox Talk is included to assist with educating employees.

We also want to remind our members of three other resources;

1. The MSI has a Playground Safety Inspector class. Check the website for a class near you.
2. The MSI has a new online Playground Inspection class. We have included a Discussion Guide so that it can be presented to a group of Recreation or Public Works employees.
3. Your Safety Consultant is ready to assist with any aspect of your program.

This bulletin is intended for general information purposes only. It should not be construed as legal advice or legal opinion regarding any specific or factual situation. Always follow your organization's policies and procedures as presented by your manager or supervisor. For further information regarding this bulletin, contact your Safety Director at 877.398.3046.



Recording / Reporting Playground Deficiencies

Toolbox Talk Lesson Plan

The conditions of our playgrounds and parks are important to the residents of our community. Let's take a moment to discuss the policies and procedures we have in place.

Our playgrounds are inspected **[INSERT FREQUENCY]** by **[INSERT DEPARTMENT OR NAME OF INDIVIDUAL]**. But we are in or driving past playgrounds and parks almost every day. We can have a bigger impact on the appearance of our parks and playgrounds than any one else. I want to review this department's policies if you see problems in our parks. This includes:

- Damaged playground equipment
- Broken glass
- Graffiti
- **[ADD ADDITIONAL OR LOCAL CONCERNS]**

If you are in a park, cutting grass or collecting trash, etc., and see a condition that you can correct such as:

- Mulch around playground equipment that has been significantly kicked out such as under swings
- Objects, such as tables or toys, that have been moved into the fall zones of playground equipment
- Swings over the top of the swing set
- A loose or broken component that can be quickly fixed, tightened, etc.

Our policy is to take care of it right then and record it **[HOW - write it down where, call it in to who, etc.]**. If you take 5 minutes to rake mulch back under the swings or sweep up broken glass, which is better than leaving it and having a child injured. The department wants you to take that 5 minutes, but we need to document it.

If you see a condition that will require lengthy repairs, or will need to order parts, such as:

- Broken railings
- Damaged tables

A condition that can be expected to cause injury to a child should be called in immediately to **[WHO]**. If the condition is severe enough stay there until we can make it safe. If it is not an imminent hazard, and you have a cone or CAUTION tape, we would expect you to secure the scene as best you can.

If you see conditions such as:

- Arson
- Intentional damage
- Significant graffiti
- Any other criminal activity

Call **[WHO – department and / or the police on their non-emergency number]**.

Do you have any questions?

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