



PLAYGROUNDS & PLAYGROUND SAFETY

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A large part of my job as CEO of Kidstuff Playsystems, Inc. is answering questions about playgrounds, playground safety and playground safety surfacing.

PLAYGROUND SAFETY AT YOUR COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

First, there are a couple of documents that pertain. ASTM is a quasi- governmental agency that writes standards for a wide range of manufactured products in the US. [ASTM F-1487](#) is the playground standard that we adhere to in order to provide International Plan Equipment Manufacturers Association (IPEMA) certified equipment.

It covers such possible safety hazards as sharp points and edges, protrusions, inadequate use zones around the equipment, heights of barrier walls, sizes of openings where a climber meets a deck, heights of slide side rails, and on and on. So look for an IPEMA-certified playground manufacturer when you are ready to make a playground purchase. A document available for purchase that is more consumer-oriented is the US Consumer Product Safety Commission publication [#325 Public Playground Safety Handbook](#). It is a great resource for the lay person who wants to gain some general knowledge about safe playground design and practices.



The number one cause of accidents on playgrounds is a fall to a hard surface under and around the playground. Adequate safety surfacing is a must to protect your association from a lawsuit. If you use wood chips, the most affordable of the approved options, you must maintain a depth of 9-10" to remain safe. This will require periodic raking and replenishing, and eventual replacement of the wood chips. Other surfaces such as poured in place rubber and artificial turf require less

maintenance but are up to 5 times more expensive.

The average life of a playground is about 15 years. After that time parts begin to deteriorate, maintenance becomes more extensive and expensive, and aesthetically the assets appear “old”. While not the typical case, a few well maintained playgrounds can last as long as 20 years. Maintenance is important, because as an example surface rust must be treated or it will eventually lead to structural failure.

PLAYGROUND SAFETY FOR CHILDREN OF ALL AGES

Another consideration is the ages of the children that will be using the playground. There are a different set of ASTM standards for ages 2-5 and ages 5-12. It is possible to provide a playground set for ages 2-12 but it has to be designed to the 2-5 standard. This results in a playground that is quite boring for the older age group. Ideally, your association should provide a separate playground for ages 2-5 and one for ages 5-12. Each playground should be clearly marked with a sign or a sticker on the equipment as to the appropriate age group of the users.

Playground safety is paramount. Regular routine maintenance is time well spent. See a playground professional to help you plan a playground that is appropriate for your situation and your budget.

Richard Hagelberg, CPSI, co-founded Kidstuff Playsystems, Inc. with George McGuan in Gary, IN in 1982. Richard has a masters’ degree in early childhood education and operated child care centers, leading him into the playground field.