
PLAYGROUND SAFETY: MORE THAN CHILD'S PLAY

by Gary Gate

The simple swing. Not much too it, but the simple act of swinging provides much more than just a quick "thrill." Swinging is extremely beneficial to a child's overall development and teaching of cooperation, competition, imagination, and a whole host of other physical and psychological effects. The value of play at every stage in life is imperative to well-being. All of these benefits - from a simple swing. Now think about the seemingly endless options the playground in your parks offer.

With all of these unique and exciting play features, who is responsible for maintaining safety for children and adults as they play, learn, and grow?

The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) estimates 205,000 injuries occur on playgrounds each year - 15 of these incidents result in death. While these numbers may seem small compared to other causes, the fact that an overwhelming majority of those injured are young children is heartbreaking. The question is not if, but when will one of these injuries happen on a playground in your community. Will you be able to say you have done everything possible to ensure your public playgrounds are as safe as they can be?

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) is ready to assist you with the Certified Playground Safety Inspector (CPSI) course. Offered twice each year in Missouri, it has served to certify more than 425 individuals statewide since 2010. The CPSI program offers the most comprehensive and up-to-date training on playground safety. Course materials and exams



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are updated every three years to keep current with CPSC and ASTM standards. Two days of classroom and hands-on instruction are followed by an examination on the third day.

"I feel the CPSI course is extremely beneficial to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers recreation management program. The Corps of Engineers is the number one provider of federal recreation and it is critical to keep our playgrounds in safe conditions. This course provides the information as well as training to do just that." - Bret Struckwald, park ranger, USACE

The number one cause of injury on playgrounds is from falling. The number one cause of death is from head and neck entrapment on play equipment. It is always sobering to see how easily these incidents can occur. Accordingly, the course spends a great deal of time discussing safety surfacing and identifying hazards that could lead to strangulation. Examples: Fasteners; partial and fully enclosed openings; barrier rails; and many more seemingly harmless features. NRPA supplies testing kits for use during the hands-

on exercises that, when employed correctly, work to identify areas on a play structure that do not meet current guidelines. Not every failure to meet the guidelines is grounds for closing or removing a structure; however, participants learn how to prioritize hazards and the steps needed to remedy the issues.

"Anyone involved with playgrounds at any level should participate in the CPSI course so they can manage their playgrounds in a safe and professional manner," says Struckwald.

If you are interested in learning more about the CPSI course schedule and all topics covered, visit www.nrpa.org/CPSI or www.mopark.org for more information. Attendees come from various agencies, including: municipal parks and recreation, public works, school districts, construction contractors, playground equipment designer/installers, day cares, risk management companies, military installations, and more. The Missouri Park and Recreation Association hosts two courses per year - one in the St. Louis area and one closer to Kansas City.

Are your playgrounds ready for this summer? Playground safety is no accident! □

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