"BEST PRACTICE" Opinion:

Sandbox Playspaces

Question: Do I really need a cover on my sandbox?
Answer: Probably not.

The Canadian Playground Standard does not include a clause within it's requirement text specifically pertaining to sandboxes. However, there is a fundamental requirement to provide safe and clean (free of debris and contaminants) play environments at all times.

CAN/CSA-Z614, National Standard of Canada for Children's Playspaces and Equipment

Section 7 – Materials

Sub-section 7.7 *This manufacturer and owner/operator shall ensure that users of the playground equipment cannot ingest, inhale, or absorb through body surfaces potentially hazardous amounts of substances as a result of using the playspace.*

Section 10.4 – Maintenance of protective surfacing

Sub-section 10.4.3 *The owner/operator shall keep the protective surfacing within the protective surfacing zone of each piece of play equipment free from extraneous materials that can cause injury, infection, or disease.*

Annex F (informative) – Space requirements for recommended play activities

Sub-section F3.3 Sand play areas
Note: The following summary notes recognizes, and credits, aspects of this Annex F (non-mandatory, informative only) section of the Standard relevant to the appropriate design of sandbox play elements.

Essentially the underlying worry, or concern, with sand-play features (including playspace protective surfacing) is with the potential for the sand to be contaminated by animal (pet) fecal waste. As sandbox play is most common within childcare settings it has long been recognized by Licensing Representatives that, at minimum, "*if the sand play area can be covered, it should be covered*."

Covers:

Although I support the position that loose-fit covers are effective as an animal control measure, it is also my experience that they are largely not necessary and often neglected as the daily removal-replacement chore becomes onerous for the staff. As cats in particular are territorial and lazy, simple perimeter fencing may often be enough of a barrier to keep them out. As a result, unless the playspace has indeed shown signs of animal activity (prevalence within the neighbourhood) there is often very little, if any, concern in this regard. The need for covers may then (in my opinion) be only applied to those play areas or sandboxes as a reactive measure when the need is recognized to the comfort of the owner/operator. With that said though, if a cover is used my suggestions are that:

- ✓ They be constructed from light-weight flexible material
- ✓ They be custom fitted to the shape and dimension of the sandbox
- ✓ They be constructed of mesh-style material to
  - a) prevent the pooling of water (standing water is a very significant hazard for bacteria, mosquito larvae)
  - b) allow sunlight to dry out moisture and provide a natural (ultraviolet) purifying effect

Design:

As sand play is recognized as a popular play activity for children of all ages, my position is to make the sandbox as big as possible within the given playspace. Suggestions include:

- ✓ Position away from active traffic areas, and away from direct building access points (to minimize sand tracking into building)
- ✓ Utilize natural shade as much as possible for location
- ✓ Include raised perimeter frame as containment for sand as well as bench seating for users
  - a) approx. 100mm to 300mm in height for both depth containment and seating comfort (ideal play sand depth is 300mm/12 inches)
  - b) top seating edge to overlap the inside edge of the sandbox to minimize sand spill-over
  - c) top seating edge to be a minimum width of 90mm for seating comfort
  - Note: a perimeter design that maximizes edges and corners is preferable
- ✓ Perimeter support framing to be constructed of user-friendly material, such as but not limited to poly-timber wall sections, wood timber (pressure treated) support frame, soft-wood lumber bench seating (ie: cedar, pine)
  - Note: any/all support framing and/or bench seating must be checked regularly for sharp edges, corners, and splinters (if wood)
- ✓ Ensuring proper drainage is critical towards maintaining the sand as clean and free of mould/mildew contaminants as such where soil conditions or site layout location is problematic for drainage an additional drainage tile system (to an external outlet) should be strongly considered

Shade:

Providing shade is an important aspect of any playspace, yet may be much stronger for sand play as these areas are ideal for social and interactive play that may leave children exposed to the elements for longer period of times. As such, it is ideal to utilize natural shade as much as possible when selecting a location. However, if natural shade is not possible, or is limited, a strong suggestion would be to include an overhead shade trellis-frame or enclosed roof in the design.

Sand:

Last but not least is the sand itself. The properties of sand used for purpose-built sand play, varies from the type of sand used as loose-fill protective surfacing for elevated playstructures. In that the fundamental property required for sand as impact fall protection is that it cannot compact! That sand is then typically coarser and with larger particles that the sand used for sandbox play. Although sandbox play sand still needs to be clean washed and screened for contaminates and uniform sizing it is most ideal that it be finer grained, and compactable for sturdy sand-castles. My suggestion in this regard is to confirm, and double-check by a hands-on sample the actual sand that will be used prior to purchase and delivery.
Note: once delivered, record that selected source in your files as the need for additional top-ups becomes very regular in an active sandbox!

PHOTO EXAMPLES

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