Safe Kids Canada

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Playground Standards in Canada
Frequently Asked Questions

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- What are the insurance and liability issues surrounding playgrounds? Are operators at a higher risk if they don't meet CSA standards?
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Are there standards or laws about playground safety in Canada?
The Canadian Standards Association (CSA) has developed the only nationally recognized standard on children's playspaces and equipment.
The CSA Standard is called **CAN/CSA-Z614-07 Children's Playspaces and Equipment**. Its purpose is "to promote and encourage the provision and use of playspaces that are well-designed, well-maintained, innovative, and challenging, and, in so doing, contribute to the development of healthy children in the broadest sense of the word."
The CSA Standard provides detailed information about:

- Materials,
- Installation,
- Strength of the equipment,
- Surfacing,
- Inspection,
- Maintenance,
- Performance requirements,
- Access to the playground,
- Playspace layout,
- Specifications for each type of equipment.

The Standard is complex, and communities may need assistance in evaluating their playgrounds in accordance with the Standard.
The CSA first published guidelines for playgrounds in 1990. They were revised and accepted as a National Standard by the Standards Council of Canada in May of 1998. An updated edition was published in July 2003. In May 2007, the newest edition of the CSA Standard was published. The newest version includes several changes and enhancements including:

- Change in fall height measurement
- Addition of appendix on guidelines for including water features in children's playspaces
- A surfacing materials comparison chart
- Addition of a guideline for making playspaces more accessible to children with special needs

To learn about all aspects of the CSA Standard, it is important to buy a copy of the Standard. Contact CSA at www.csa.ca or phone 1-800-463-6727. Hardcopy or PDF format costs $65 and are available in English and French.

Who is responsible for playground safety?
The person, company, or organization that owns or operates a playground is responsible for the safety of the equipment and environment there.
Some important points about the CSA Standard:

- It is voluntary, not a law.
- It applies to public playgrounds, such as on school grounds, in parks, or at day care centres or motels. It is not intended to apply to private, residential (home) playgrounds or indoor facilities.
- There is no national enforcement body for playground safety. Some jurisdictions in Canada have passed regulations requiring public playground operators to ensure that their playgrounds meet the CSA Standard. For example, playgrounds at day care centres may be required to meet the standard in order for the centre to get an operating license in some provinces.
- It is not retroactive. This means that it only applies to playspaces and equipment installed after the date the Standard was published.
- CSA does not certify playgrounds or specific pieces of play equipment.

In Canada, several organizations deliver training to certify playground safety inspectors who can evaluate playgrounds based on the CSA Standard. Click to learn more about playground inspectors and inspections.

What are the insurance and liability issues surrounding playgrounds? Are operators at a higher risk if they don't meet CSA standards?
The CSA Standard is not a law and is intended to apply to new playspaces. Following the CSA Standard only becomes mandatory when the Standard is referenced in legislation or a regulating organization's policy (for example, in Ontario daycares must have playgrounds that meet the CSA Standard in order to get an operating license). Canadian experts in child care, recreation and liability tell Safe Kids Canada that a solid program of inspections, maintenance and a schedule of improvements can also be used in court to show that a playground operator is exercising "due diligence".

For existing playgrounds, how should owners or operators plan for improving safety?
From a practical point of view, we recognize that many organizations and jurisdictions which operate playgrounds cannot afford to immediately rebuild entire playgrounds. Sometimes rebuilding an entire playground is not necessary - upgrades and improvements to equipment and surfacing may be enough. Older playgrounds may present injury risks of varying degrees to the children who use them. Realistically, we can expect that a significant number of older playgrounds will continue to exist in many Canadian communities for some time.
Safe Kids Canada recommends that community authorities work together to develop long-term plans to audit and upgrade public playgrounds. Depending on the community, partners in this effort might include school boards, municipal parks and recreation departments, day care licensing bodies, day care operators, local injury prevention coalitions, First Nations band councils, and public health departments. We also strongly recommend that providers of liability insurance be involved in the assessment and planning process. Life-threatening or very serious hazards should be addressed right away. Here are the steps we recommend:

- Assess your playgrounds, preferably with the help of a qualified playground inspector.
- Make a plan to address any hazards you find.
- Remove or repair life-threatening or very serious hazards right away.
- Plan to upgrade other injury hazards as quickly as possible.
- Plan to bring the entire playground up to CSA Standard over the next few years.
- Plan to keep your playground inspected and maintained on a regular basis.
- Make upgrading protective surfacing a top priority.

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