



The Dirty Dozen Checklist: What is hiding in your playground?

As a public entity, it is important that playground areas and equipment are kept safe and free from hazards. It is recommended that a playground inspection be performed at least monthly during the summer. Below are the most common areas noted for deficiencies:

- **Improper Protective Surfacing:** The surface or ground under and around the playground equipment should be soft enough to cushion a fall.
- **Inadequate “Use Zone”:** A “use zone” is the area under and around the playground equipment where a child might fall.
- **Protrusion & Entanglement Hazards:** A protrusion hazard is a component or piece of hardware that might be capable of impaling or cutting a child if a child should fall against or on the projection.
- **Entrapment in Openings:** Enclosed openings on playground equipment must be checked for head entrapment hazards.
- **Insufficient Equipment Spacing:** Improper spacing between pieces of play equipment can cause overcrowding of a play area resulting in unsafe play conditions.
- **Trip Hazards:** These are created by play structure components or items on the playground.
- **Lack of Supervision:** The supervision of a playground environment directly relates to the overall safety of the playground.
- **Age-Inappropriate Activities:** Children’s developmental needs vary greatly from age two to age twelve. Equipment in a playground needs to be appropriate for the intended user.
- **Lack of Maintenance:** In order for playgrounds to remain in “safe” condition a program of systematic, preventive maintenance must be present.
- **Pinch, Crush, Shearing, and Sharp Edge Hazards:** Components in the play environment should be inspected to make sure that there are no sharp edges or points that can cut skin.
- **Platforms with NO Guardrails:** Elevated surfaces such as platforms, ramps, and bridgeways should have guardrails or barriers that would prevent accidental falls.
- **Equipment NOT Recommended for Public Playgrounds:** Heavy animal figure swings, multiple occupancy swings, free swinging ropes, athletic equipment.