



Comprehensive Playground Inspection and Maintenance Programs

As spring approaches, now is a great time inspect playgrounds and to review the maintenance program for your playgrounds. A comprehensive maintenance program consists of inspections at three basic frequencies.

Annual Audits

Document the condition of each piece of playground equipment and the surrounding areas by taking pictures.

A comprehensive annual playground risk management program starts with an audit. The audit consists of inventorying and examining each piece of playground and ancillary equipment, the park's grounds and structures, and perimeter streets and curbs.

Periodic (weekly to monthly) Inspections

Define the frequency of inspections in the written Playground Maintenance Program. Many departments begin to ramp-up the inspection program's frequency rate beginning in the Spring. The frequency of a playground's inspection is determined by several factors; the season, how many children use the playground, harsh environments such as on a beach, neighborhood demographics, age of equipment, history of damage, and more.

Use a checklist. A sample checklist is on the MEL website (www.njmel.org). A checklist offers the advantage of documenting what was inspected and found to be in satisfactory condition. By only reporting deficiencies, the worker who completed the report is open to questions of what conditions were or were not inspected, possibly months or years later. Remember the rule of documentation, "If it is not written down, it did not happen."

Daily Inspections

Instruct workers to visually check the playground equipment and grounds for obvious problems such as broken equipment, graffiti, etc. Workers are in the parks almost every day; cutting grass, picking up trash, or even just driving by on their way to other assignments. Paperwork is not needed unless a deficiency is found.

Instruct workers to immediately correct conditions that can be fixed, or report conditions as soon as possible conditions that cannot be corrected. The maintenance program should describe the documentation process for when repairs are made, or how a deficiency report is submitted.

Record even routine maintenance activities such as replenishing mulch or closing the gaps on S-hooks. Playground owners should have a 'paper trail' of work performed by employees.

Document all repairs to playground equipment. Repairs should be made using manufacturer's parts. Use tamper-resistant hardware. Have a stock of spare hardware on hand.

Hold a Safety Briefing to remind employees what to look for, what deficiencies should be addressed immediately, and how to report deficiencies that cannot be corrected on the spot. A sample Safety Briefing lesson plan is provided on page 2 of this Bulletin.

Please use the bolded italicized items above as an Action Plan to ready your playgrounds for the summer season. We also want to remind our members of three other resources;

1. The MSI has a Playground Safety Inspector class. Check the website for a class near you.
2. The MSI has an online Playground Safety Inspection class for Public Works and Recreation.
3. Your Safety Consultant is ready to assist with any aspect of your program.

This bulletin is intended for general information purposes only. It should not be construed as legal advice or legal opinion regarding any specific or factual situation. Always follow your organization's policies and procedures as presented by your manager or supervisor. For further information regarding this bulletin, contact your Safety Director at 877.398.3046.

Safety Briefing

The conditions of our playgrounds and parks are important to the residents of our community. Let's take a moment to discuss the policies and procedures we have in place to ensure our playgrounds are safe.

Our playgrounds are inspected *[INSERT FREQUENCY]* by *[INSERT DEPARTMENT OR NAME OF INDIVIDUAL]*. But we are in, or driving past, playgrounds and parks almost every day. We can have a bigger impact on the appearance and safety of our parks and playgrounds than a periodic inspection. I want to review this department's policies if you see problems in our parks, such as:

- Damaged playground equipment
- Broken glass
- Graffiti
- *[ADD ADDITIONAL OR LOCAL CONCERNS]*

If you are in a park, cutting grass or collecting trash, etc., and see a condition that you can correct such as:

- Mulch around playground equipment that has been significantly kicked out such as under swings
- Objects, such as tables or toys that were moved into the fall zones of playground equipment
- Swings over the top of the swing set's top support bar
- A loose or damaged component that can be quickly tightened, fixed, or replaced.

Our policy is to take care of it right then and record it *[Describe HOW - write it down where or call it in to who.]*. For example, if you are collecting trash and see that the mulch at the bottom of the sliding board is kicked out, we want you to take 5 minutes to rake mulch back under the slide. Or, to sweep up broken glass. But, we also need to document it. This helps the town protect itself from liability claims.

If you see a condition that will require lengthy repairs, call **[WHO]** at your first opportunity. If the condition is severe enough, stay there until we can make it safe. If it is not a severe hazard, and you have a cone or CAUTION tape, secure the scene as best you can. If you are not sure of how dangerous a condition is, contact **[WHO]** for guidance.

If you see conditions such as:

- Arson
- Intentional damage
- Significant graffiti
- Any other criminal activity

Call *[Police or WHO – department and / or the police on their non-emergency number]*.

What questions do you have?
