

A guide to: Playground Safety Inspections

Introduction

The information below has been compiled for organisations with responsibilities for the safety of playground equipment.

Whilst the design, selection and initial installation of equipment is crucial to the safety of playgrounds it is not sufficient to rely on this alone. Rather, once installed the safety of the equipment must be continually monitored and managed through a robust programme of inspections and maintenance.

There is no specific legislation relating to playground equipment; however, the general duties imposed under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 will apply, and the safety of users must therefore be ensured so far as is reasonably practicable. Playground managers also have a moral responsibility and a legal duty under common law to take reasonable care of children using the equipment.

In order to assist in determining what is reasonable, the primary standard to consider are EN 1176 and EN 1177.

Inspections

Guidance is provided within EN 1176 Part 7 on the type and frequency of inspections that should be completed. These “frequent”, “operational” and “annual” inspections when conducted by competent persons, will assist organisations in meeting their responsibilities.

Routine Inspections:

In most cases it is sufficient to conduct frequent inspections on a weekly basis. However, if the equipment is old, subject to heavy use, frequently vandalised or located near to the coast (where rust is of greater concern), daily inspections are advisable.

A frequent inspection should include a visual check of the equipment to identify any obvious faults or hazards as well as a check of the playground surface and surrounding areas to ensure that they are free from hazards (e.g. broken glass, fouling, etc.).

Frequent inspections may be carried out ‘in-house’ by a competent person in accordance with the manufacturers’ instructions.

It is advisable to keep a record of frequent inspections in order for it be evidenced that they are being completed at the required frequency and for potential claims defensibility purposes. The use of a checklist is recommended to assist the inspector in identifying the areas that need to be covered and to demonstrate the breadth of the inspection.

Maintenance (or Operational) Inspections:

In most cases maintenance inspections should be completed quarterly. However, if the playground consists solely of static equipment (e.g. slides, climbing frames, bars, etc.) and does

not include any equipment with moving parts (e.g. see-saws, swings, roundabouts, etc.) the frequency may be reduced to six monthly.

If the equipment is old, subject to heavy use, frequently vandalised, or located near to the coast; maintenance inspections should be completed more frequently (i.e. monthly).

In addition to the areas covered within frequent inspections, checks should also be conducted to ensure that all fixings are secured and bearings are lubricated. Where required, scratches in paintwork should be touched in and repairs to the playground surface made. RoSPA has published guidance entitled "Routine Inspection of Playgrounds" to assist with this type of inspection.

As with frequent inspections, maintenance inspections may be carried out 'in-house' by a competent person in accordance with the manufacturers' instructions. Inspections should be recorded and the use of a checklist is highly recommended in order for it be evidenced that they are being completed at the required frequency and for potential claims defensibility purposes

Annual Inspections:

An overall inspection of all aspects of the playground should be carried out by a specialist, independent inspector once per year. Such inspections may be available from insurance companies, playground equipment manufacturers, companies specialising in such inspections and safety organisations, such as RoSPA.

As well as the areas covered during frequent and maintenance inspections, the annual inspection should cover long-term structural problems, wear and tear, and any changes in Standard compliance or best practice.

On completion of their inspection, the inspector should provide a written report detailing any areas of concern, and make recommendations for any maintenance or remedial work that may be required.

Training and Competence

Where inspections are being carried out 'in-house' it must be ensured that the staff tasked with completing the inspections are provided with adequate information about their tasks and responsibility.

Whilst the need for formal training will increase with the size and complexity of playgrounds, and may not be a necessity for small playgrounds consisting of mostly static equipment, it is recommended that some form of basic training in playground inspections is provided. Such training may be available from the organisation carrying out the annual inspections or by specialist course providers, such as RoSPA.

The completion of such training will help to improve the quality of internal inspections and will also assist in demonstrating the competence of internal inspectors.

Risk Assessment

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 contain a general requirement to conduct an assessment of the risks that people are exposed to arising from an organisation's activities. Where the organisation is responsible for playground equipment this will include any risks associated with that equipment.

When completing the risk assessment all of the significant hazards present, or likely to arise through use, should be documented along with corresponding control measures.

A robust programme of inspections and maintenance can contribute to the risk assessment process by both helping to identify hazards and by acting as a key control measure.

Further Reading

RoSPA – “Routine Inspection of Play Areas” [available at: <https://www.rospace.com/play-safety/advice/routine-inspection/>]