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| <b>Health and Safety Executive</b>  |               | <b>Sector Information Minute</b> |                       |
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Target Audience:  
AFQ Inspectors  
SG Specialist Inspectors

## SAFETY IN CHILDREN'S PLAYGROUNDS

This SIM provides information on the physical standards expected in children's playgrounds, the management systems play providers should have in place and the relevance and status of applicable European Standards.

### BACKGROUND

- 1 Every year there are a significant number of accidents to children in playgrounds due to fixed play equipment (approximately 41,700 in 1998). There is one fatal accident every 3 to 4 years on average.
- 2 The main locations where equipment-related playground accidents occur are public playgrounds, parks, schools and public houses or restaurants.
- 3 There is considerable public interest and concern surrounding this area and both the Food and Entertainment and Services Sectors receive a significant number of queries from the field and other sources every year.
- 4 The Play Safety Forum, sponsored by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, has been charged with taking forward the public debate on safety in childrens' playgrounds. The Sector is a member of the Forum. HSE has also commissioned research into playground safety and the report is expected to be available late 2001.

### EUROPEAN STANDARDS

- 5 There are 2 European Standards of particular relevance to this area. BS EN 1176 *Playground equipment* covers the requirements for the design, manufacture and installation of playground equipment. BS EN 1177 *Impact absorbing playground surfacing* specifies the requirements for surfacing to be used in childrens' playgrounds and the methodology for its testing. Further information can be found in Entertainment Sheet No 11.
- 6 In common with other standards, these are not retrospective and are not legally binding. However all play providers should have them in mind when making decisions regarding playgrounds and equipment.

### IMPACT-ABSORBING SURFACING

7 Impact-absorbing surfacing (IAS) covers a range of materials, for example, manufactured tiles, in-situ formed materials, loose particulates and natural materials such as turf, bark and sand.

8 It should be noted that the installation of IAS is not a complete solution to the potential for injuries in a playground. Impact-absorbing surfacing is tested for its efficacy in reducing head injury severity and it may not be effective in reducing other injuries. The efficacy of IAS in reducing overall numbers of injuries is not proven. Of equal importance is maintenance of properly designed and installed equipment.

#### ACTION BY PLAY PROVIDERS

9 All play providers (eg local authorities (LAs), parish councils) installing or significantly refurbishing existing play facilities (this includes the equipment and the site) should ensure that they meet the requirements of the EN Standards above.

10 Providers should also carry out a suitable and sufficient risk assessment on the play facility as simple compliance with the EN standards does not guarantee compliance with health and safety legislation. They should take account of the siting of the playground for instance. Bodies such as RoSPA can assist with this process.

11 Providers also need to ensure that there are appropriate management systems in place to ensure that facilities are maintained in good order and that damage is repaired promptly.

12 Where providers are responsible for older facilities, they should carry out a risk assessment. They should use the results of the assessment to prioritise any renewals, refurbishment or removal of equipment. They should also consider the installation of IAS as part of the assessment process.

#### ACTION BY INSPECTORS

13 It is unlikely that inspectors will have the necessary experience or specialist equipment to inspect fixed playground equipment against current European standards. Such prescriptive equipment inspections must be carried out by a recognised competent person. Good evidence of competence would be membership of the Register of Play Inspectors International Ltd (RPII). Inspectors should satisfy themselves that play providers have suitable management systems in place to: prioritise and action the areas of concern which fall out of regular inspections; carry out risk assessments; and implement the controls indicated by the assessment. This includes maintenance of equipment and any IAS provided. If such systems are absent or are inadequate then enforcement action should be considered in the normal manner.

14 Where play providers have carried out assessments and have prioritised items for action, these should be actioned within a reasonable time frame, attending to the areas of highest risk first and as a matter of urgency. Providers should consider temporary removal of a facility until remedial measures are taken. If action plans are not present or the timescale is unreasonably long, then enforcement action should be considered.

15 The presence of non-impact-absorbing surfacing in the impact area (see BS EN 1176) would be a matter of significant concern and enforcement action should be considered. The Sector view is that enforcement solely on the provision of IAS is **inappropriate** and should be combined with enforcement action on management systems.

#### INFORMATION

16 General enquiries regarding this SIM should be addressed to the Food and Entertainment Sector, Entertainment Section at the Glasgow office, email Area 21, FOD Entertainment Section.

17 For enquiries involving LA-run playgrounds, Services Sector, Local Government Section at the Chelmsford office, should be consulted.

18 Technical queries on equipment should be addressed to the local SG.

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