



PURPOSE

This guidance is intended to help child care, early learning center, and public school administrators understand playground safety inspections including the differences between an inspection and audit and the purpose of each. It also provides clarifications on applicable standards, and describes how to select a qualified playground inspection consultant.

WHAT ARE THE NATIONAL PLAYGROUND SAFETY STANDARDS?

National standards and guidelines related to public playground safety were started in the 1980s due to the realization that many serious playground injuries were preventable through proper placement, fabrication, and upkeep of equipment. Today, the main standards and guidelines related to playground safety include the several documents developed by the American Society for Testing and Materials including; ASTM F1487, ASTM F2223, ASTM F1951, and ASTM F1292. In addition, The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) *Guidebook for Public Playground Safety* provides guidance and reference standards.

ARE PUBLISHED REQUIREMENTS AND GUIDELINES THE LAW FOR CHILD CARE CENTERS, PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND EARLY LEARNING CENTERS?

Rhode Island law currently only requires public schools meet CPSC guidelines for safety. However, state licensing, BrightStars and other regulatory and accreditation entities all utilize portions of CPSC and ASTM standards as part of their regulatory compliance and quality assessments. In addition, there is significant case law where ASTM and CPSC published requirements and guidelines have been use to prove owner/ operator negligence in court cases involving injuries in the playground.

WHAT IS CONSIDERED A "PUBLIC PLAYGROUND?"

Guidelines for public playground safety apply to all schools, child care centers (including family child care), early learning facilities, multi-family residential complexes, and public parks. It does not apply to single family residential use play areas. These guidelines only apply to outdoor play areas, not indoor gyms or soft contained play structures.

HOW ARE PLAYGROUND INSPECTORS TRAINED AND CERTIFIED?

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) certifies playground inspectors through a three day training course that is offered on a rotating basis in various states. To learn more about certification go to www.nrpa.org/cpsi/.

HOW DO I OBTAIN A PLAYGROUND SAFETY AUDIT OR INSPECTION?

You should contact a certified playground safety inspector (CPSI) in your local area that provides private inspection and audit services. You can contact the Rhode Island Child Care & Early Learning Facilities Fund (RICCELFF) located at the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) at 401-331-0131 or riccelff@lisc.org for a listing of current Certified Playground Safety Inspectors providing private inspection services.

SELECTING A QUALIFIED PLAYGROUND INSPECTOR

Inspectors must be certified through the NRPA and be listed on the current certification register, which can be found at http://www.nrpa.org/CPSI_registry/default.aspx. In addition, inspectors should have a background in the playground industry and show demonstrated experience in the design, fabrication, inspection, or maintenance of equipment. NRPA certification only covers the minimum requirements for inspecting playgrounds in accordance with ASTM and CPSC standards. However, an inspector with an in depth background in the park and playground industry will be able to provide a wealth of knowledge during the inspection process and bring a truly trained eye to the inspection process. Before you hire a CPSI, validate their credentials by interviewing them, asking for a resume, or requesting references from past clients that have had similar inspection work performed.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AN AUDIT AND INSPECTION AND WHICH SHOULD I CHOOSE?

There are different levels of inspections that can be provided by CPSIs depending on your situation.

Playground Audits

A playground audit is a very in depth inspection whereby the CPSI must check each and every component of a play structure and play area to certify compliance, or non-compliance, with ASTM F1487 and CPSC guidelines. Audits are typically done immediately after a play area is installed. Audits are also done when a play area has never been inspected, standards change, or if major repairs are performed. In an audit, a CPSI identifies any non-compliant issues and also ranks the issues based on a hazard priority level. An audit will vary substantially in price by site based on a variety of factors, including; size of playground, complexity of site, age of equipment and individual inspector rates, but typically will cost in the range of \$500.00 - \$1,500.00

Playground Inspections

Playground inspections fall into three different categories, "regular," "low-frequency" and "high-frequency." Regular playground inspections are typically performed once a reasonable "standard of care" is met. This means that an audit has been performed, compliance achieved, and a safety program has been set up with the CPSI.

"Low Frequency" inspections are performed by either trained in-house staff or a CPSI to perform a "hands on" analysis of equipment. This would typically include checking S-hooks on swings, bolts, attachment areas, etc. A qualified CPSI can help set up an inspection program for you and can provide ongoing services if requested. Every site will have different frequency needs for inspection, but at least annually should be the minimum. A typical inspection will cost \$300.00 - \$600.00, again varying based on site requirements and individual inspector fees.

More frequent inspections are called "high frequency" inspections. These are typically performed by in-house staff (weekly) and check for only major apparent safety issues and overall play area condition. You should maintain a playground inspection file on site that includes your initial audit, subsequent inspections, details of equipment and surfacing and documentation of in-house inspections and corrective measures.

If you have never had an inspection performed or do not have documentation that your equipment is certified as compliant, you will likely need an audit to start. Talk to a qualified CPSI who can guide you through the process of setting up a "standard of care" for your program.

RESOURCES

Please contact The RICCELFF / LISC at 401-331-0131 or riccelff@lisc.org for more information on obtaining the services of a Certified Playground Safety Inspector. In addition, you can find out more information about inspections at the following web sites:

- <http://www.cpsc.gov/PageFiles/122149/325.pdf> - The CPSC Handbook for Public Playground Safety, Publication No. 325. A great resource for playground safety information that is free to the public.
- <http://www.nrpa.org/CPSI/> - The National Park and Recreation CPSI website. You can learn more about certification and check out a listing of current CPSIs.
- <https://www.nrpa.org/our-work/playground-safety/> - A full listing of playground safety related resource links including ASTM standards, forms, and other related associations.
- <http://playgroundsafety.org/> - A user friendly information site on playground safety. This site is not affiliated with the NRPA. They offer their own special training that is not certified by the NRPA.