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Playground Operating Guidelines

Guidelines for operating a playground in a public environment

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Guidelines for operating a playground in a public environment

Equipment installed in public areas shall fulfil the requirements from a valid published standard, which shall be ensured throughout the lifetime of the equipment. There are different types of equipment, e.g. playground, outdoor fitness, parkour, park and urban furniture, roller sports etc., which will require safety management. This guide for the operational management will help provide general information that can form the basis to operate the equipment or facilities.

National laws and local regulations shall always be considered for the place where the facility is installed, as these can vary according to the type of facility and where it is. It should also be noted that the supplier's product warrantees and certification will only be valid when the equipment is installed and maintained according to instructions provided.

The Product Safety Act, within the EU, requires that products supplied in a public environment should be safe. Regardless of when equipment is provided, its ongoing safety must always be assured. Under this Act, the primary route suggested is by ensuring the equipment is in accordance with a published valid standard*. This requirement applies regardless of where the equipment is provided or when the equipment is installed. Although the latest published Standard should always be referenced, it does not automatically mean that older products supplied in accordance with previous versions are unsafe, if they are not completely in accordance with the latest requirements.

* Standards that may be referred to;

- Playground – EN 1176
- Multi-Sport – EN 15312
- Outdoor Adult Fitness – EN 16630
- Wheeled Sport – EN 14974
- Parkour – EN 16899




General

Procedures related to design procurement, operation, installation, maintenance and inspection shall be established. As required, consideration shall also be given to the local environment, including; extreme weather conditions such as heat, cold, rain, location, wind or high use areas, local use factors or where vandalism is common place.

Risk/Benefit Assessment:

The principles of safety management are applicable both to workplaces in general, as well as to play provision. However, the balance between safety and benefits is likely to be different in the two environments. In Play provision exposure to some degree of risk may be of benefit because it satisfies a basic human need and gives children the chance to learn about risk and it's consequences in a controlled environment.

This principle holds for all facilities that offer opportunities for user development. It is important to ensure that a distinction is made between 'good' risks that provide these developmental opportunities and 'bad' risks, which do not. Good risks should be apparent and foreseeable to the user, so users can make an assessment for themselves as to whether to attempt the particular challenge that is offered. Bad risks on the other hand are likely not to be easy for the user to assess and with limited benefit.

Playground equipment and other installed products within the playground shall be properly maintained to reduce risk for accidents.

The process of a Risk/ Benefit Assessment (RBA) provides a tool for identifying good risks and bad risks to ensure any controls are appropriately applied, and a priority is established where more than one issue is identified for improvement.

Design procurement

All public facilities need proper design consideration to ensure the equipment/products and ground surfaces selected, are those that best fit with the needs of the target users and the facility fits well into the wider environment.

Where considering children's play equipment in particular, it is important that these facilities are provided with some clear separation from other recreational provision that may include greater risks to children, should they misuse the products in a way not intended. Examples of other provision would be Roller Sports, Parkour and Fitness etc.

This separation can be provided in a number of ways and will help ensure they are not confused as being provided for children's spontaneous play. For more information please see CEN/TR 16879.

Other risks within the local environment, such as roads and suitable access points must also be taken into account to form part of any project brief, together with the results of local community consultation.

Operation

General

All public equipment/facilities shall be included in an Operational Plan. This Operational Plan should describe procedures for maintenance, inspection and operation. An Operation Plan should include all equipment / facilities that are in the same area of Operator responsibility, with links to other neighbouring areas of responsibility, where appropriate. For example, these could be segregated by; area around apartment building, district in a town/municipality or all equipment in the town/municipality. The overriding objective is always to ensure the safety of the equipment/facilities throughout its lifetime, as required by local, national or European laws, applicable standards and community expectations.

Operations Manager

The Operator must determine the appropriate system in the organization that ensures the on-going safety of the equipment, for as long as it is provided and make this available as an Operational Plan.

The person responsible for the operation must ensure that the documentation for the equipment is kept in a satisfactory manner and is readily retrievable.

The person responsible for operational management shall periodically and at least once a year, review the effectiveness of the Operational Plan and if necessary make changes to improve its effectiveness.

Personnel

Personnel performing specific functions within the Operational Plan, for the different tasks, shall have the necessary and appropriate experience and competence. Personnel shall receive adequate information regarding their duties, authority and responsibilities.

The necessary competence level is dependent on the task and training may be required.

Documentation

Documentation should include: delivery documents, assembly instructions, delivery dates, inspection reports/protocols, product test certificate valid at the date of delivery, maintenance instructions, operating procedures, a post installation inspection report (if requested) and information regarding personnel qualified to perform the tasks, according to the established operating procedures.

General safety measures/Signage

At every facility there shall be an information sign stating:

- Telephone emergency (SOS 112).
- Telephone number, unit for operation and maintenance.
- The place where the equipment is installed.
    - o Address location.
- Other relevant information;
    - o Any specific Information on the products provided.
    - o Some types of facility, for example adult fitness products will require specific warnings and information to be provided.
    - o Equipment intended user of age.

Identified defects

Generally, defects can be categorised at 3 levels; being high, medium and low priority, with the aid of a risk/benefit assessment. Those of low priority can be handled through routine maintenance. However, those of medium or high priority will need specific attention, which in the case of high priority may need to be immediate. If this is not possible, the equipment should be secured against use e.g. by immobilization or removal.

Injuries/Accidents

Information regarding accidents/damage reported to the Operations Manager should be recorded and contain at least the following information:

- The time when the accident occurred (date and time).
- Weather conditions
- The injured persons age, sex, clothing and footwear.
- On which area of the specific product, the accident occurred.
- Number of children who were involved at the time of injury.
- Description of the accident;
    - o Injury sustained including part(s) of body affected.
- Extent of damage.
- Witness statements.
- Actions taken;
    - o Possibly implemented changes due to the accident.

For information and if necessary, this report should also be sent to the supplier/distributor of the equipment/facility.

Personal safety

Undertaking of repair work that may compromise the safety of staff and users should be avoided during times when the facility is in operation. Where required, the area should be secured against access from the general public and specifically children, until repairs are completed.

Equipment alterations

Alterations to parts of the equipment or structure that could affect the essential safety of the equipment should only be carried out after consultation with the manufacturer or a competent person. In some cases, issue of a new product test certificate or site inspection report for the equipment may be recommended, where a change is included from the original documents obtained.




Installation

General

All required information should be compiled prior to installation. Information necessary for the installation will include, for example; position on site, space requirements, anchoring depth, choice of ground surface material, assembly instructions, possible need of a machine for excavation, unloading truck or other assistance during installation program. Depending on the vehicle access to the chosen site, different installation solutions at different costs may be required.

Assembly of all types of equipment/facilities shall always be done using the provided assembly instructions for each product, by the supplier.

Excavations/Fillings

Prior to finalising the final position for the equipment, an assessment of the existing site should be completed. This will include checking for;

- Ensure there are no cables or other services that are in the ground where excavation will be required.
- Ensure there are no overhead cables, mast or similar that could restrict the height of the facility or its access.
- Ensure any existing trees or other natural features are protected, where required.
- Ensure any existing site gradients will not affect any requirements for equipment ground clearances.
- Ensure the existing soil does not contain any contaminates that could create a hazard to users of the facility or those installing.
- Ensure a suitable assessment of the existing soil materials is carried out.
- Where required, suitable site drainage may also need to be provided.
- Backfill shall be made in such a way that there is no risk for subsidence.
- Correct backfill material shall be selected, depending on the material chosen for the impact attenuating surface, where this is required.

Safety

The public must be prevented access to the installation area (please see local or national Code of Practice and safety regulations) until any work on the facility is completed and installation inspection is complete. It also includes the areas of the facility that are to be provided with special surfaces.

Cast in place

All concrete work must be performed by personnel with the appropriate competence and in the right way.

Surface

All equipment must be provided with a suitable surface, which will vary depending on the requirements according to each type of equipment. In particular, for play equipment products, the material shall in most of cases have some impact attenuation, which reduces the risk of head injury resulting from falls. Specific material selection should be based on the functional and standard requirements. Different surface options will require different levels of ongoing maintenance, which must be understood and planned for, prior to selecting.

Requirements regarding user and supervisor accessibility of the equipment shall always be considered. For more information, please see CEN/TR 16467

Installation Inspection

After completion of the installation and landscaping a 'Post Installation Inspection' for safety, function and to confirm correct assembly, should be carried out. Any significant deficiencies should be corrected before the equipment is made available for use.

Assembly instructions shall be retained and safely filed in accordance with the Operational Plan.

Inspection and Maintenance

The Operational Plan will need to include a schedule for Inspection and Maintenance and who has the 'Maintainer' responsibility. Different requirements will be applicable for different types of product/facility, which should be advised by the equipment suppliers. In general, those products of a dynamic nature will likely require a higher level of maintenance, including the periodic replacement of consumable parts. A robust Inspection and Maintenance program will not only help sustain the safety of provided facilities, but also ensure any wear or damage is repaired promptly in accordance with product warranty requirements.

It is generally recommended that three levels of inspection are planned for;

1. Visual inspection (daily or weekly depending on user frequency, and risk of vandalism)
2. Operational recorded inspection (at least four times per year depending on user frequency, risk of vandalism and weather conditions)
3. Annual inspection by a competent person

The supplier of the products/facilities should always provide an Inspection and Maintenance document that will form the basis for the Operational Plan. However this may need to be modified, based on local factors such as user frequency, risk for vandalism or weather conditions.




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