

# ADVENTURE PLAY AREAS

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Play areas are a good way for children to learn, but they can get injured if the use of the area and equipment is not managed properly. The variety of play equipment available is wide and can be as simple as a swing but can also include assault courses, climbing walls and rope swings installed in woodlands. These all need to be managed and controlled in a way that the risks associated with their use are as low as possible.

It is estimated that there are approximately 40,000 injuries to children on playgrounds each year which result in a hospital visit. The most common accidents are falls, but slips, loss of grip and loss of balance can also be a factor resulting in those falls.

Although there may not be any employees directly affected by use of adventure play equipment you have a duty to ensure the health, safety and welfare of people other than those who you do not employ but who are affected by your work activities; this includes members of the public. By operating adventure play equipment on a commercial basis you have a duty to ensure that the risks associated with using it are as low as is reasonable practicable.

## EQUIPMENT DESIGN

**Equipment** – Any play equipment installed since 1st January 1999 should meet the requirements of European Standard EN 1176. Equipment installed before this time meet BS 5696 or DIN 7926 or have undergone third party testing or risk assessment.

**Floor surface** – The nature of play equipment means that the risk of falls is high. Even where equipment is well designed, falls can occur and it is important that the surrounding floor surface provides some protection against injury when this happens. Suitable surfaces surrounding play equipment may include: grass, sand, wood chippings and impact absorbent synthetic materials.

**Location** – Accidents associated with adventure play equipment are not only related to direct use of that equipment; incidents can result from dog

bites, collision with vehicles and lacerations from litter such as glass. It is therefore important that where possible it is located away from areas which may present a danger to children e.g. car parks, water courses not associated with the equipment, business traffic routes etc. Where complete separation is not possible, consideration should be given to providing fencing or other physical separation between the play equipment and the hazard. Strict rules surrounding the use of the equipment should also be in place such as the exclusion of animals and sharp objects.

## INSPECTION AND MAINTENANCE

Inspections to play equipment should be carried out to ensure that they remain in good condition and that any maintenance issues are identified at an early stage. Inspection should not only focus on the adventure play equipment but also on the surrounding areas. Different types of inspection should be carried out:

- **Routine Inspection** – This looks at the equipment's basic condition, especially faults due to recent vandalism. Such inspections may be carried out by the manager or his / her staff and should be recorded on a simple sheet or book
- **Operational Inspection** – This should involve inspection in more detail of the equipment, essentially for vandalism and certain types of minor wear. Such inspections may be carried out by the manager or his / her staff and should be recorded. With a good, routine hands-on check linked to the annual inspection, the quarterly check may not be necessary
- **Annual Inspection** – This should be carried out by a specialist not connected with the adventure play area. It should consider vandalism, minor and major wear, long-term structural problems, any changes in play equipment design standards compliance and design practice, risk assessment etc. This should be carried out by a suitably qualified person who is a registered inspector of play equipment.



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## SUPERVISION

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The level of supervision required for use of play equipment will depend on the nature of that equipment and how well the risks are controlled. Under 16's should always be supervised by a responsible adult. For more complicated activities or more dangerous activities such as high level ropes based equipment, supervision by a competent person should also be provided i.e. somebody who has been specifically trained to use that equipment. Pre-use instruction may also be necessary in some circumstances.

## USEFUL LINKS

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[www.rosopa.com/play-safety/advice](http://www.rosopa.com/play-safety/advice)

### The Next Step

The information provided in this guidance is a brief overview of a diverse work activity. This activity may require further assessment and consultancy work completing to ensure statutory compliance.

NFU Mutual Risk Management Services (RMS) can provide additional support in this area using one of its specialist in-house consultants who are based around the UK.

Please contact RMS on **0800 132 029**, where we can discuss your requirements further.

Alternatively please contact your local NFU Mutual office to discuss any requirements or visit the NFU Mutual website to view our RMS services [www.nfumutual.co.uk](http://www.nfumutual.co.uk)



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