

Five important steps to help ensure safety of children on playground

With the recent announcement of US First Lady Michelle Obama's Let's Move initiative to battle childhood obesity, The International Play Equipment Manufacturers Association (IPEMA) in the US is reminding parents and caregivers of the importance of providing an hour of free play outdoors in a safe play environment during National Playground Safety Week (April 26-30). The advice is equally applicable here in South Africa.

IPEMA, a leader in safety certification of playground equipment, has compiled a list of five important steps families, caregivers and communities should take to help ensure safety on the playground and to help children realise the many social, emotional, physical and cognitive benefits of play.

"With the increased focus on combating childhood obesity, parents can turn to simple and no-cost activities such as outdoor free play to help contribute to kids' active and healthy lifestyles," said Tom Norquist, past president of IPEMA and leader of the Voice of Play advocacy initiative. "Insisting that the kids put away the video games and go outside to play is one of the most important things we as parents can do, and a safe playground environment is part of a positive play experience."

- **Don't forget what's below your feet!** Grass is not an acceptable surfacing for playgrounds. One of the leading causes of injury on playgrounds is falling from playground equipment. To minimise the frequency and severity of injury from playground falls, it is crucial to have certified playground surfacing, such as engineered wood fibre, poured-in-place or rubber mulch surfacing installed under and around the equipment on any public playground. This surfacing is certified to have sufficient depth or thickness to minimise impact injuries from falls.
- **Be an advocate for safety standards.** Playground equipment and surfacing have been carefully evaluated by the United States Consumer Product Safety Commission and the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM). The standards set by these organisations help ensure that playground equipment and surfacing is age appropriate and designed with the measurement of children's physical dimensions, skills and abilities in mind. IPEMA runs an industry-leading certification program to test and validate playground equipment and surfacing to meet ASTM standards.
- **Proper installation is key to safety!** Playground equipment should be installed by individuals experienced in assembly directions and knowledgeable about the environment surrounding the playground, including soil, drainage and the use of other construction materials, tools, equipment and machinery. The manufacturers of specific pieces of equipment can provide certified installers, or the International Playground Contractors Association can provide assistance.
- **Check, re-check and then check again.** Once the equipment and surfacing are installed, have a post-installation safety audit performed by a person certified in playground safety prior to use. This audit will determine if any equipment or surfacing is non-compliant and will help prioritise any issues that should be corrected before the playing begins. Proper installation also includes posting signage about the age-appropriateness of specific equipment.
- **Don't underestimate maintenance and upkeep.** Proper maintenance can be forgotten - but is one of the most important aspects of ensuring safety on a playground. Maintenance processes must be in place on both a routine and long-term basis. Equipment and surfacing must be checked for signs of damage following severe weather and for signs of vandalism or any other man-made or natural catastrophe. In addition, equipment and surfacing will show natural wear and tear each year and regular maintenance inspections and replacement processes should be in place to minimise hazards.

Source: IPEMA

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>