

# **PLAY AREAS & PLAY CENTRES**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Play areas are becoming increasingly common, both indoors and outdoors, at public houses, hotels and other, specialised sites. Unfortunately, accidents to children have also risen. Contributory factors in many cases of injury have included:

#### **Management**

- Incorrect design and layout
- Unsuitable equipment
- Poorly designed equipment
- Incorrect installation
- Poor inspection and maintenance procedures

#### **Users**

- Lack of adult supervision
- Misuse of equipment
- Unsuitable clothing
- Weather conditions

### **SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS - PLAY AREAS**

#### **1. Location**

- Easy access for children and adults; ideally access routes and the play area should be overlooked.
- Avoid need to cross car parks, etc. Direct access from the play area to car parks, etc. to be restricted by barriers.
- Security of the site against vandalism.
- Well drained site and hazard-free surroundings.

#### **2. Layout/Design**

- Appropriate quantity and siting of equipment for designed usage.
- Sufficient 'circulation' space adjacent to equipment.
- Prevention of dog fouling by fencing and self-closing gates, signs, etc.
- Most reputable suppliers provide a design service.

#### **3. Equipment**

- Should conform to BS5696 : 'Play Equipment Intended for Permanent Installation Outdoors' or to a Common

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European Play Equipment Standard. Equipment should carry the appropriate kitemark.

- Suppliers should provide written confirmation of compliance with appropriate standards.
- Whilst these standards are not mandatory, they represent good practice and may be referred to in any legal action.
- The booklet 'A Code of Practice for the Safety of Play Equipment in Commercial or Business Premises' (see References/Further Details) lists key points that should be taken into account in the selection and layout of swings, slides and rotating equipment.
- Wherever possible an independent post-installation check of new sites should be undertaken. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) operates such a scheme.

#### **4. Surfaces**

- BS5696 recommends the use of impact absorbing surfaces where the fall from equipment is greater than 60cms.
- Impact absorbing surfaces should be of an appropriate standard, laid to an appropriate standard and in appropriate areas, relevant to the equipment.
- If loose fill surfaces are provided, allowance should be made for regular cleaning, maintenance and replenishment.

#### **5. Inspection and Maintenance**

- A comprehensive and documented inspection and maintenance programme should be implemented.
- Three categories of inspection are recommended:
  - i) daily;
  - ii) 1-3 monthly;
  - iii) a full certified inspection at intervals not exceeding 12 months.
- Certified inspections are offered by reputable manufacturers or suppliers, or independent organisations such as RoSPA.
- Suggested items to be covered during checks are given in the booklet 'Code of Practice for the Safety of Play Equipment, etc.'
- Full records of inspections should be kept.

#### **6. Emergency Procedures**

- Contingency plans, accident/complaint log books, adequate public liability insurance and first aid facilities are considerations here.

## **INDOOR ADVENTURE PLAY CENTRES**

- Recommended safety precautions include:
  - adequate level of supervision, both by adult carers and members of staff. For the latter in general this may be in the region of one competent supervisor to every 30 children or part thereof, but this may be affected by factors such as the size of the play centre, whether there are mixed age groups or where there is high risk equipment;
  - appropriate length of play sessions;
  - appropriate age and size limits as necessary;
  - safety rules established and promoted through signs/posters;
  - establishing, and keeping to, maximum capacity;
  - waiting areas close to the entrance may be beneficial;
  - any high risk equipment or facilities to be identified and specifically supervised;
  - identification and control of unsafe or inappropriate behaviour by children.

## **INFLATABLE BOUNCING DEVICES ('Bouncy Castles')**

Entertainment Sheet No 7 'Safe use and operation of play inflatables, including bouncy castles (See References/Further Details) gives extensive guidance on such equipment, summarised as follows:

- Access to the device at outdoor events
  - use of barriers, fences, etc.
  - soft landing mats at appropriate locations
- Safe Operation
  - use of all anchorage points
  - not to be erected/used in high winds
  - suitable number of attendants
  - safety rules for 'bouncers'.
- Training of operators and attendants
  - on all aspects of erecting, operating, supervising and dismantling the device.
- Examination, inspection and maintenance
  - thorough examination at least every 14 months by an appointed person; this will include examination of the blower, the inflatable and the electrical installation.
  - Inspection before first use on any day (list of items detailed in ES7).
  - Maintenance, following manufacturers' guidance and schedules.
  - Records should be kept.

## **CHECKLIST - PLAY AREAS & PLAY CENTRES**

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|----|--|-----|----|
| 1. | Is the play area/play centre safely located?   | YES | NO |
| 2. | Has the play area/play centre been designed and laid out in accordance with safe practice?               | YES | NO |
| 3. | Does all equipment conform to a recognised safety standard (ie. British Standard 5696)?                  | YES | NO |
| 4. | Has the facility been checked post-installation?   | YES | NO |
| 5. | Are suitable impact absorbing surfaces used in connection with the equipment?                            | YES | NO |
| 6. | Is there a comprehensive and documented inspection and maintenance regime in operation?                  | YES | NO |
| 7. | Is there an adequate level of supervision?   | YES | NO |
| 8. | Are there established safety rules and are these extensively promoted?                                   | YES | NO |
| 9. | If inflatable bouncing devices are used, do you meet the standards specified in Entertainment Sheet No 7 | YES | NO |

## **REFERENCES/FURTHER DETAILS**

- \*1. Booklet : A Code of Practice - The Safety of Play Equipment provided for use in connection with Commercial or Business Premises. (E & W Sussex Health and Safety Liaison Group/RoSPA).
- \*2 Booklet - The Children's Playground (RoSPA).
- \*3. Outdoor Play Areas for Children (Institute of Leisure and Amenity Management) ILAM House, Lower Basildon, Reading, Berkshire, RG8 9NE.
- \*4. RoSPA Information Sheets (18) on Children's Playgrounds (RoSPA, Cannon House, The Priory Queensway, Birmingham B4 6BS).
- \*5. Booklet - Supervision Guidelines for Indoor Adventure Play Centres (City of Wakefield MDC).
- \*6. Entertainment Sheet No 7 'Safe use and operation of play inflatables, including bouncy castles (HSE)  
[www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/etis7.pdf](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/etis7.pdf)

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- \* Available to view by prior arrangement at Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council, Environmental Health Division, Council House, Coton Road, Nuneaton. CV11 5AA
  - \*\* Free copy available from Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council at the above address.

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