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Safe play means maintenance

Michael Hoenigmann of the Association of Play Industries explains why regular maintenance and repairs are an essential aspect of safe play.

Public playgrounds and commercial play areas feel the impact of many hours of active play by thousands of children each year. Wear and tear to play equipment and surfacing is inevitable so it is important to ensure that play facilities are safe and compliant with standards at all times.

That means ensuring that play operators take a rigorous approach to ensuring all outdoor and indoor play spaces are regularly checked, maintained and, where necessary, repaired. Having a good inspection and maintenance regime in place is crucial to ensure the safe operation of a play area. Before opening or operating any new play area, a post-installation inspection should take place. This is undertaken by a registered and certificated annual outdoor inspector from the Register of Play Inspectors International (RPII) and is commissioned by the play company or operator of the site.

Once this inspection is complete and satisfactory, responsibility for safety passes to the operator, who must put in place an inspection regime as set out in BS EN 1176, the standard for play equipment. According to the RPII, best practice is to adopt a three-tier inspection regime incorporating RPII training for staff, which covers:

1. Routine visual inspection

Observation of the play space by a trained staff member looking for obvious hazards such as missing or broken parts, broken glass or vandalism. This should take place weekly during low periods of use and daily during times of high usage.

2. Operational inspection

A more detailed structural examination of wear, tear and stability of equipment by a trained staff member. This should take place every three months during low usage periods and once a month during times of high usage.

3. Annual main inspection

4. An annual inspection by a qualified external RPII annual outdoor inspector to ensure compliance with standards and overall safety.

UK parks, playgrounds and other outdoor spaces play a vital role in providing children with positive early experiences of physical activity, and keeping them safe means ensuring equipment is well-maintained. By choosing an Association of Play Industries (API) member, play area operators will have the reassurance and peace of mind that they are working with a reputable, financially stable and experienced play company partner.

The API represents manufacturers, installers, designers and distributors of outdoor and indoor play equipment and safety surfacing, and it campaigns at the highest levels for policy recognition of the value of www.theleisurereview.co.uk

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active play. API member companies install high-quality play equipment using certificated products and wherever the 'API current member' badge appears, play operators can be sure they get expert advice from a reputable company, based on many years' experience. Association members operate to the highest standards, abide by a strict professional code of conduct. They are also credit-checked and monitored regularly for financial stability and security.

Michael Hoenigmann is chair of the API.

For further information about the API, its members and how it can help support school play projects or improvements, contact api@api-play.org or visit www.api-play.org Information about the Register of Play Inspectors International can be found at www.playinspectors.com

The Leisure Review, October 2014

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