

Planning a Playground

Five Steps to Building a Safe, Long Lasting Play Environment

Planning a playground can be fun, but the task of choosing the right play equipment for your organization can also be a bit intimidating. Here are five helpful steps designed to help make the process a little easier. Please call our office at 1-800-266-1250 at any time for assistance in making your playground purchase a successful one. Good luck!

Step #1: Assess your needs

In this step your goal is to find out what you are trying to accomplish with your playground. You should ask your organization the following questions:

- What is our budget? Will we be buying all at once, or purchasing in phases?
- How many children and what ages are we trying to accommodate?
- How much space do we have available? Where will the new play equipment be located?
- Do we have children or parents with specific needs?
- What is our timeframe for purchasing and installation?

Tip: Make sure to determine what your budget covers. You should consider equipment cost, shipping, site preparation, safety surfacing, border material, and installation. Typical percentages are: 50% for equipment, 30% for delivery & installation, and 20% for surfacing.

Step #2: Choose your Site

This is an important process that can affect your playground for years to come. Please analyze your projected area for proper slope and drainage. Your area should be relatively flat with just enough slope to eliminate standing water. Remember, areas that hold water will increase your maintenance cost of your surfacing material and limit the amount of days you can play on your playground. Trees and shrubs can provide great shade and aesthetics, but make sure they don't impede your vision for proper supervision. Also, check for any low hanging or unstable limbs that could be climbed on or could fall into a play area. Often times the best site for your new play equipment will be in an existing playground area and it will be replacing old, unsafe play structures. If this is your situation please assess the amount of work in demolition of the old play structure. You should contact your city or local locating service for determining the location of any water, sewer, electric, gas, cable TV or telephone lines. It is important to do this now, as it can greatly affect the design and location of your play area.

Step #3: Select your Equipment

There are many areas to consider when selecting your playground equipment. The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) recommends that you divide your playground into two separate areas: (1) for 5-12 year old users and (1) for 2-5 year old users. Composite structures that connect many types of play activities to elevated decks can accommodate a large amount of

children in a small area. These items offer climbing, sliding, social and imaginative play all in one structure. Freestanding items such as swings, climbers, imaginary panel, and spring rockers can be added to spread out your area and increase your play value by catering to a large variety of users. Safety should be your top concern. Select only equipment that is IPEMA (International Play Equipment Manufacturers Association) Certified. This assures that your equipment has been 3rd party tested to comply with both the CPSC's Handbook for Public Playground Safety and ASTM (American Society for Testing and Materials) Standard F1487 guidelines on play equipment. To verify that your equipment complies, visit IPEMA's website. Accessibility is another important concern. The American Disability Act (ADA) mandates that all new and modified playgrounds must offer activities for use by children with disabilities. The accessibility requirements vary based on the size of your overall play area. At a minimum, you should consider providing an accessible path to the playground using accessible surfacing, providing transfer points on your composite structures, and adding freestanding ground level components. Please contact us to guide you through this design process.

Items to consider when choosing your manufacturer:

- Durability of material used
- Manufacturer's warranty
- Delivery time
- Ease of installation or qualified installers who are certified to install
- Manufacturers' liability insurance
- Follow up and response time of local representative
- Experience and reputation of the local representative
- Availability of innovative and unique play activities

Ask your representative to provide you with scaled drawings of your play area, a 3 dimensional rendering with your selected color scheme, and a detailed cost breakdown of all proposed expenditures including site work, equipment, shipping, tax, installation, and surfacing.

Step #4: Choose your Surface

According to the Consumer Product Safety Commission, Nearly 65% of all playground injuries are due to falls to the surface. Therefore, your surfacing is just as important as your equipment.

Surfacing Options:

1. Loose fill surfaces such as pea gravel, sand, and wood chips are the least expensive and easy to install. They do, however, require the most maintenance to meet the impact attenuation standards of the CPSC. They also have diminished in popularity because of their inability to provide handicap access. Our recommendation for loose fill surface is a manufactured wood fiber. It should have a manufacturer's warranty and a written confirmation that it complies with the CPSC, ASTM, and ADA standards.
2. Uniform rubber surfaces such as poured in place rubber or tiles are the most expensive (as much as 10 times the cost of loose fill), but are the most durable and require the least

maintenance. They can guarantee the proper impact attenuation, and accessibility required by CPSC, ASTM and ADA.

3. Artificial Turf may be an excellent solution for your playground surfacing. Turf can provide an aesthetically appealing surface for playgrounds as it resembles real grass and is relatively low maintenance. Again, be sure the manufacturer provides certification that the surfacing product is IPEMA certified.

Step #5: Ordering & Installing your Playground

Once you've decided on a manufacturer, it's time to order your equipment. You will need to select your colors and provide a desired shipping location and contact name and number. Make sure you have a projected time frame in mind before ordering your equipment. Check with your manufacturer for shipping times and allow the proper time for installation. (Give yourself a buffer for delays due to soil conditions, weather, etc.)

Once an order is placed, your order will be manufactured and delivered to your specified location. The shipping company will call you in advance to schedule a delivery appointment. Many large items require a forklift or additional personnel so be sure to prepare for this ahead of time. When offloading, it is very important that you inventory all items before signing for the shipment. If a shortage is discovered, you can notify your manufacturer immediately and have parts re-shipped in time for your installation.

Depending on your budget, time restrictions, and personnel, you have several options for installation.

1. Volunteer installation: You install the equipment with volunteers from your organization. Your manufacturer should provide you with detailed installation instructions. This is obviously the least expensive choice and puts the responsibility for the installation on your group.
2. Supervised Installation: With this option, a manufacturer's trained installer will supervise your workers on installation day. This option typically involves a daily fee and is a great way to save money, yet ensure that your own workers are installing your equipment efficiently and correctly.
3. Full installation: This option is the most expensive, but requires the least amount of work and responsibility for your group. Have your manufacturer install the equipment with a certified crew. They can also handle surfacing, offloading and inventory of equipment if agreed on in advance. If you require site prep and are unable to complete this yourself, this may also be available through professional installers. Your equipment is now ready to go, but it doesn't end there! Establish a maintenance plan and inspect your equipment regularly. The better care you take for your equipment, the longer your children can enjoy it!