



Consumer Federation of America

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Consumer Groups Warn of Continued Hazards on America's Playgrounds

Washington, D.C. --- Citing recently released data from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), the Consumer Federation of America (CFA) and U.S. Public Interest Research Group (U.S. PIRG) today repeated their warnings about unsafe playground equipment in America.

"The new government study confirms the need for playground renovation projects," stated Mary Ellen Fise, CFA General Counsel. "Injury levels have not decreased and children remain at risk."

"This data validates our findings and our concerns following last year's nationwide survey of public playgrounds," added Rachel Weintraub, Staff Attorney for U.S. PIRG. "Our examination of playgrounds found a widespread pattern of hazards which were reflected in the new CPSC data," she continued.

CFA and PIRG surveyed 1,024 playgrounds in the spring of 2000 in 27 states and Washington, DC. The study found serious dangers at a majority of public playgrounds across the country posed by hard surfacing, equipment that is too high, openings in equipment that can entrap children, and swings that are too close together.

"The new CPSC data also confirms that children are injured on playgrounds when they fall down from equipment that is too high onto surfacing that is too hard," said Fise. 80% of playgrounds in the CFA/PIRG study had surfacing that was too hard, posing a risk to children who fall. The new CPSC study found that cases involving serious head injuries occurred on surfacing that was too hard. The CPSC study also confirmed CFA/PIRG's emphasis of the importance of adequate protective surfacing.

In addition, the CFA/PIRG study found that nearly half of all climbing equipment was too high- at more than six feet. The new CPSC data found that falls comprised 79% of all injuries in public playgrounds. The CPSC data also found that climbers accounted for the greatest proportion of injuries in public playgrounds: 53% of injuries occurred on climbers, compared to 32% in 1988. "This data confirms that limiting playground equipment height is critical to preventing playground deaths and injuries," said Weintraub.

The new CPSC study underscores the need for improved playgrounds. The CPSC study reviewed playground equipment –related injuries treated in U.S. hospital emergency rooms from November 1998 through October 1999 and playground-related deaths reported to CPSC from January 1990 through August 2000. CPSC found:

- In 1999 an estimated 205,850 children were injured seriously enough by playground equipment to require hospital emergency room treatment. Approximately 75.8% (156,040) of these injuries occurred on public playgrounds and 24.2% (49,810) occurred on home playground equipment.
- Preschoolers (under age 5) and school-age children age 5-9 received the greatest number of injuries (86% combined). Girls were injured slightly more frequently (55%) than boys (45%).
- Injuries on public play equipment occurred in the following proportion:
 - * 45% of injuries occurred at schools, an increase from 42% in 1988.
 - * 31% in public parks, a decrease from 42% in 1988.
 - * 10% in commercial daycare settings
- CPSC is aware of 147 deaths associated with playground equipment between January 1990 and August 1, 2000. These deaths do not include all playground equipment-related deaths. Like injuries, the majority of these deaths (75%) occurred to children age two to nine. More deaths occurred at home (70%) than on public play equipment (30%)
- The top three hazards patterns associated with the 147 deaths were: hanging (56%); falls (21%); and tipover or collapse of the equipment (16%). The groups note, however, that in recent years CPSC has purchased death certificates reporting falls from only one or two states, and therefore fall deaths are under-reported in the agency's data.

To prevent children's deaths and injuries, CFA and PIRG recommend that parents and caregivers check their local playgrounds, especially schools, for potential safety hazards and should be vigilant about making sure that necessary changes are made as soon as possible. Consumers should use the CFA/PIRG safety survey (from Playing it Safe) available on the web at www.pirg.org and www.consumerfed.org to evaluate their local public playgrounds. A consumer checklist, *How Safe Is Your Local Playground*, is available at the CFA web site (www.consumerfed.org) by clicking on "Consumer Information."

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CFA is a non-profit association of over 280 pro-consumer groups, with a combined membership of 50 million, that was founded in 1968 to advance the consumer interest through advocacy and education. Web address: www.consumerfed.org

U.S. PIRG is the national lobbying office for the State Public Interest Research Groups. State PIRGs are non-profit, non-partisan public interest advocacy groups active across the country. Web address: www.pirg.org