



Consumer Federation of America
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PUBLIC PLAYGROUNDS PLACE CHILDREN AT RISK

PIRG/CFA Release National Survey

Washington, DC -- Hard surfacing, equipment that is too high, openings in equipment that can entrap children, and swings that are too close together pose serious threats to children at a majority of public playgrounds surveyed across the country, according to a survey report, *Playing It Safe*, released today by U.S. Public Interest Research Group (U.S. PIRG) and Consumer Federation of America (CFA).

According to the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), 170,100 children require hospital emergency room treatment and 17 children die each year as a result of injuries sustained on playground equipment. "Playgrounds can be wonderful places for children to have fun and face new challenges, but far too many playgrounds contain dangers that can injure and even kill," said Rachel Weintraub, Staff Attorney at U.S. PIRG and co-author of the report.

"Parents should be cautious about their local playgrounds," added Mary Ellen Fise, Product Safety Director at CFA and co-author of the report. "Unfortunately, we easily located many unsafe playground surfaces and equipment that can lead to injuries and deaths."

In their fifth national survey of public playgrounds, the PIRGs and CFA surveyed 1,024 playgrounds in 27 states and Washington, DC. The researchers focused on the hazards that cause the most serious playground injuries, -- falls, impact with moving swings, entanglement and head entrapment.

At eight out of ten playgrounds across the country, researchers found surfacing that is too hard. "Children are injured on playgrounds when they fall down from equipment that is too high onto surfacing that is too hard," Rachel Weintraub said. Because 75% of all injuries are caused by falls, protective surfacing under and around play equipment is a critical factor on playgrounds. The report also found that nearly half of all climbing equipment is too high- at over six feet.

PIRG and CFA also found that 27% of swings nationally had swing spacing hazards. Swings that are too close to each other or to other equipment increase the chance that a child will be hit by a moving swing. The report also found that children can face strangulation hazards at more than a third of all playgrounds nationally, because of head entrapment and clothing entanglement dangers caused by gaps, protrusions and other similar hazards.

The groups noted that six states --California, Connecticut, Michigan, New Jersey, North Carolina, and Texas-- have taken legislative action to protect their children from playground hazards.

"We urge other states to follow this example and pass strong playground safety legislation. We also urge CPSC to strengthen its guidelines and work with local jurisdictions to identify and remove unsafe equipment." Fise said.

CFA has produced a Model Law on Public Play Equipment and Areas that contains detailed provisions addressing safety and design for all play equipment and areas, as well as separate requirements specifically intended for equipment for pre-school age children and for school age children. First published in 1992, the third edition contains a detailed cross-comparison with the CPSC voluntary guidelines for public play equipment.

The groups encouraged state and local jurisdictions to adopt these requirements and use them when purchasing new equipment or when refurbishing, remodeling or maintaining existing playgrounds. CFA has prepared its Model Law as a blueprint for safe playgrounds. It goes beyond the voluntary guidelines, in its requirements and gives legislators the child development rationale for critical safety measures.

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Consumer Federation of America is a non-profit association of over 260 pro-consumer groups, with a combined membership of 50 million that was founded in 1968 to advance the consumer interest through advocacy and education. For more information visit the Consumer Federation of America web site www.consumerfed.org.

The U.S. Public Interest Research Group is a national non-profit, non-partisan consumer and environmental advocacy group with half a million members across the country. For more information, send e-mail to pirg@pirg.org or visit the PIRG web site <http://www.pirg.org/consumer/playground/00/>.

For parents who would like to check on their neighborhood playgrounds, CFA offers a free Parent Checklist: How Safe Is Your Local Playground? The checklist sets out 12 important factors to examine and includes an explanation of what is recommended for safer playgrounds.

CFA also offers another fact sheet, Home Play Equipment: Tips for Buying and Using, on home play equipment, addressing the safety of backyard play sets and offering tips for selecting and using home playsets. Both fact sheets are available free to individuals by sending a self-addressed stamped envelope to: Playground Checklist, PO Box 12099, Washington, DC 20005-0999 or on the web at www.consumerfed.org. The full *Playing It Safe* report is available on the web at www.pirg.org.