

Play Areas & Play Equipment

The management of Play Areas and Play Equipment is very similar to Mechanical Equipment. Both Legislation and Best Practice are governed by the same principles, with more emphasis on the users and risk associated with its use.

Like all equipment we use in our industry, the design and manufacture are a key component. That is supported by thorough inspections before each use and structure/integrity inspections by a competent person at least 3 monthly.

It makes no difference whether the attraction purchases a Play Equipment from a supplier, or whether they make them themselves, they still must be built and maintained to a standard that prevents failure or instability when in use. The person who designs or makes the Play Equipment is responsible for making sure they are designed and manufactured so they are safe and stable. They must ensure they have considered what can fail, what circumstances will cause the failure, and ensure the resultant effect is contained so the passenger is not put at risk. They must also ensure they are fitted with the correct safety equipment to ensure the passenger is safe when getting in, when the ride is in motion, and when the passenger is getting out. Legislation is very clear on these requirements and prohibition from use will be applied if the Play Equipment is not compliant.

Play Equipment must be:

1. **Designed, installed and maintained within the definition of BS EN 1176 & 1177. The standards require a management scheme to be operated by the Operator and subject to an annual RPI Inspection completed by a registered RPII Inspector.**
2. **That which does not fall within the scope of BS EN 1176 & 1177 will still need to comply with the general duties placed on the Designer, Manufacturer and Operator.**
3. **The structure, design and stability of the equipment MUST be risk assessed before the use of the equipment is permitted.**
4. **The structure and stability risk assessment should be completed by the designer or manufacturer and advice given to the operator regarding any limitations that should be imposed due to the design.**
5. **Likewise, the surfaces surrounding the equipment. Weather conditions and ground stability will also be part of that assessment.**
6. **You must complete a play use risk assessment for this area of your activity and either have completed the installation of control measures or you can demonstrate a planned delivery of the controls.**
7. **Make sure you have both Manufacturers User and Technical Handbooks for the equipment you use.**
8. The equipment and surrounding area must be maintained so that you are sure it is:
 - Robust enough to withstand the type of treatment you would expect from the profile of visitor you attract.
 - Properly maintained, which includes cleaning and defect free whenever in use.
 - Inspected daily before use, and a weekly thorough inspection. The inspection regimes robust and recorded.
 - Subject to a risk assessment, and wherever possible, the risk of equipment failure or foreseeable injury removed by making extra provisions or a change of design. If it is not possible to remove the risk, then you must prevent the use of the equipment, particularly if the equipment has become damaged or affected by adverse weather conditions. You should extend the assessment to include the possibility of damage occurring.

- Pro-actively managed to ensure where damage has occurred which renders the equipment harmful to the intended users, it is quickly identified and dealt with.

There are two additional British Standards, BSEN 1176 & BSEN 1177 that applies to play equipment and play areas. By downloading the free of charge guides below, you will have invaluable assistance when designing and managing your equipment and play areas. To repeat this information in this guidance would not be helpful as there are a number of different scenarios that need to be considered when designing your facilities.

- www.hse.gov.uk/foi/internalops/sectors/cactus/5_04_11.pdf has been produced by the HSE and deals with the areas they believe should be covered in a risk assessment. It also refers to other guidance they have produced which is also downloadable F.O.C.
- www.pipa.org.uk/downloads/PIPAoutline.pdf is essential guidance for the management of inflatable play equipment.

Play Areas must be carefully planned. You must be able to show that thought must be given to the effective design and layout and the methods of management you intend to operate.

You must ensure you are not inadvertently introduced a hazard by failing to foresee an obvious weakness. A good example is where ball games are permitted. The ball will go outside the play area by accident, and it is where the ball lands that may be an issue. Deep water or an animal enclosure will pose a risk to anybody who attempts to retrieve the ball. Signage asking for no ball games in this area may be needed, but also informing the public where they are permitted to play. You should put a sign up asking the public to contact a member of staff before they enter the area of risk. It might also be necessary to provide a facility to clean the ball before it is handled. It might also be helpful to provide higher netting or fencing in the area where ball games may be played.

You must, as part of your risk assessments, identify whether there is a risk to the user of the play area or equipment during periods of adverse weather. Handle or steps for instance may become slippery.

You need to ensure areas such as sand pits can be covered up at the end of each day to ensure it is not available to other animals such as cats to use as welfare facilities. Where it is impossible to cover the pit, then careful inspection each morning before the facility is open must be carried out.

Great care must be given to the surfacing you have provided. Your RPII will be able to advise you on the type and management of the surface you intend to use.

In addition to the information, you also need to remember that the requirements need to be maintained as protective measures throughout the year. Measuring the depth of surface cover must be part of your regular thorough inspection regime.

The measures highlighted in bold are essential to maintaining legal compliance and achieving the standards required.

1. Make sure you have any Manufacturers Handbooks for the equipment you use if they are available. If the equipment is self designed and constructed, make sure you have some designs to demonstrate loadings and the criteria you have applied.
2. **Make sure any equipment that is redundant or temporarily unfit for use is obviously identified and not able to be used.** Play equipment that is unfit for use and cannot be removed must be physically blocked off from use. Signs and bits of tape are easily taken down or can become detached.
3. **Make sure you have a record file which shows the inspections of the item of equipment.** The record should show not only what has happened but also what is planned to happen. This is known as a Planned Preventative Maintenance Programme [PPMP]. This should include:
 - An individual identification number if you have more than one item of equipment of the same design e.g. swings.
 - A defect reporting and management procedure that ensures the defect is dealt with in a timely manner. Such a system will also stipulate what defects renders the equipment Unsafe for Use.

- A signature of inspection before the item of equipment returns to operational duty after repair. A senior member of the operational staff should complete this.
- 4. **Make sure you have placed a notice regarding the removal of outdoor shoes when using those items of equipment where it is necessary. Regular monitoring is highly recommended.**
- 5. **Make sure hand washing facilities are nearby.** It is recommended that you have a hand wash station within sight of the play area, or the very least, a sign erected informing the users where their nearest hand wash can be located.
- 6. **Guard rails or fences must be designed to prevent persons from climbing over or under and thus gaining access to a dangerous or unauthorised area.**
- 7. **Steps and ladders need to be firmly fixed and the steps defect free.**
- 8. **Sharp edges need to be rounded off where people are climbing or holding on for balance.**
- 9. **Balance aids or handrails must be fitted at the correct height to assist the intended user of the equipment.**
- 10. **A daily inspection regime for all items of regular contact areas such as seats, handle etc. This regime must be supplemented by additional cleaning when accidental incidents occur.**
- 11. **Age limits clearly identified where they apply.**
- 12. **Weight limits clearly identified where they apply.**
- 13. **Signage that gives clear instructions as to how the equipment is to be used and if possible, in picture format.**
- 14. **A method of locking out or immobilisation any equipment when a defect is identified that renders it unsafe for use.**
- 15. **Ensure all inflatable play equipment are either fitted with the PIPA tag or you are managing your equipment within the spirit of the PIPA Scheme. It is also essential that air receivers and blowers be serviced and tested by a competent service engineer at least annually.**