

New CSA Playground Standard Published

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Do your public playspaces comply with the revised Standards?

In June 2003 new requirements were made to Canada's playground Standard CAN/CSA-Z614 *Children's Playspaces and Equipment*. Playground owners/operators and all partners who design, create, inspect and manage these public playgrounds need to be aware of the revised Standards.

CAN/CSA-Z614 Children's Playspaces and Equipment is a national voluntary standard that provides requirements for playspaces and equipment intended for use by children from the age of 18 months to 12 years. It promotes and encourages the provision and use of playspaces that are well-designed, well-maintained, innovative, and challenging.

Playground standards, such as CAN/CSA-Z614, strive to strike a balance between challenging play and serious injury reduction by dealing with issues such as material and structural requirements, appropriate protective surfacing material, hazard identification, inspection and maintenance, and specific equipment performance requirements.

The Standard is voluntary but it serves as a benchmark in what is considered reasonable care

for providing and maintaining playspaces. The 2003 edition follows the 1990 and 1998 editions and has key changes in the area of measurements, definitions and categories.

Childcare centres, municipalities and schools, manufacturers and playground inspectors apply the Standard on a regular basis. Highlights of changes in Z614-03 that will affect these groups include the following:

General Criteria

- All dimensions are given in metric. No more imperial measurements are used.
- A tolerance plus/minus 2 percent is applied to all measurements.

Age Appropriate

- Each piece of equipment, as a whole, must comply with the identified user age (i.e. no half senior and half junior structures).

Installation

- The installer of the play equipment is now named as equally responsible for ensuring compliance of any new equipment.

Structural Compliance

- The only alternative to testing for structural compliance is to have certification by a licensed professional engineer.

Surfacing

Periodic impact surface testing is now required and is the only acceptable measure of surface performance. There are no references to recommended depths of materials.

- Surface impact tests can now be done according to the procedures of the American ASTM F1292 or the European norm CEN EN 1177.

Inspections

- The annual comprehensive written report is now deemed to be a compilation of daily/weekly, monthly inspection reports throughout the year, along with listed remedial actions and the results of any impact surface tests performed. In addition to this, an annual comprehensive inspection may be undertaken.

Access/Egress

- Stairways are now quite clearly required to have guardrails and/or protective barriers at heights and elevations appropriate to given age groups.
- Age appropriate double handrails at the sides of stairs and ramps are now required where protective barriers do not exist.
- Handrails are now required on stepladders.

Playspace Layout

- Stationary equipment that a child stands or sits at, with feet at ground level, no longer requires a protective surfacing zone.
- Slides with an entrance elevation of 120 cm or less no longer require a no-encroachment zone.
- The protective surface at the ends of a swing frame are now measured from the end of the beam rather than the swing posts.
- Playhouses, slides and bucket style swings in a Small Children's Fenced Playspace (i.e. typical daycare yard) are now exempt from protective surfacing and/or no-encroachment zone requirements under certain conditions.

Equipment

- The fall heights associated with various types of play equipment have been clarified so as to reduce any confusion about the performance requirements for protective surfacing.
- The fall height for a pyramid-shaped space net is now measured from the highest point attainable.

Signage

- Owner identification with contact information must be posted in the playspace and user age identity labels must be posted on equipment.

For the most part, these changes are incremental and are based on information and feedback from past users of the Standard. An increased emphasis on testing of protective surfacing as well as increased requirements for guardrails, barriers and handrails on stairways are examples of how the new Standard is addressing the greatest cause of playground injuries, namely falls from equipment. Yet at the same time, reduced requirements for protective surface zones associated with ground level equipment and small slides increase play opportunities in small spaces where a low risk of injury exists. The Z614-03 Standard is a useful planning tool and a further evolution in the ongoing struggle to balance the need for serious injury reduction while at the same time attempting to maximize play value in our public playgrounds.

All participants in the provision and management of public playgrounds should obtain a copy of the Z614-03 Standard.

Copies of *CAN/CSA-Z614 Children's Playspaces and Equipment* can be obtained from the Canadian Standards Association by phoning 1-800-463-6727 or online at www.csa.ca

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