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Playing It Safe in Summer

How to Check for Summertime Hazards

With the arrival of summer, the sun is rising again on playgrounds, pools and park trails everywhere. But all the fun should never outshine the preparation and planning needed by public entities to keep their facilities risk-free. Here are some facts from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission:

- Each year, about 200,000 children are treated in U.S. hospital emergency rooms for playground equipment-related injuries.
- Drowning is the second leading cause of accidental death among children ages 1 to 14.

Playgrounds

Here's how to play it safe:

- Install the right surfacing material: Most injuries occur when a child falls from the equipment onto the ground. Provide safety-tested rubber or at least 9 inches of loose-fill surfacing material to prevent some of the playground injuries.
- Check the extension: Playground protective surfacing should extend at least 6 feet in all directions from play equipment, as required by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission and ASTM standards.

Swimming pools

Before the pools open, public entities have work to do in and out of the water:

- Check water quality: A best practice is to drain and fill the pool at the start of the season.
- Get the pool house in order, too: Ensure the safety of restrooms, showers and walking surfaces to prevent trips and falls around the pool. Walk the property to inspect for damage that may have occurred over the winter.
- Pool rules must be prominently posted and include hours of operation. Enforce rules without exception.

Hiking trails

Visitors aren't the only ones who should be hiking park trails. Park operators, too, should hit the trails and take an inventory of the site:

- Remove dead limbs: Limbs and standing dead trees can become hazards to trail users and a liability to those responsible for managing the trail.
- Take a picture: Have trail inspectors photograph current trail conditions to document and monitor changes in terrain.

Natural bodies of water

The majority of drownings of victims over age 15 occur in natural bodies of water, including oceans, rivers, lakes and ponds. Many public entities control or own property with large bodies of water and should mitigate the many hazards they present, such as rip tides, waves, wakes, limited visibility, sudden depth changes, vessels and motorized water vehicles, and waterborne illness, to name a few. Public entities sponsoring activities or programs in natural bodies of water should:

- Provide intense supervision of participants by adequate personnel.
- Pay constant attention to water conditions.
- Avoid sponsoring extreme sports such as water skiing with ramps or jumps, parasailing, whitewater rafting and surfing.

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