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Canadian Standards Association announces fourth edition of children's playspaces and equipment standard

New informative annex helps designers make playspaces more inclusive for children with disabilities

Toronto, May 14, 2007 – Canadian Standards Association (CSA), a leading developer of standards and codes, today announced the release of the fourth edition of the CSA-Z614 Children's Playspaces and Equipment standard. The new edition of the standard has been updated to include an annex intended to provide guidance on how to design playspaces to be more inclusive for children with disabilities. An estimated four per cent of children in Canada, or 154,720 children aged five to fourteen have disabilities.[4] Changes to the fall heights for elevated platforms and recognition of emerging play elements such as multi-user to-fro swings are also new. The scope of the standard is directed toward public playspace equipment designed for children 18-months to 12-years and does not apply to family daycares as defined by provincial or territorial childcare regulations.

"The kind of playspace environment that children need and want varies enormously with age, as well as with physical and emotional development," said John Walter, Vice President, Standards Development, Canadian Standards Association. "CSA's Playspaces and Equipment standard is designed to initially encourage the provision and then the use of playspaces that are designed and maintained safely. The intent of the standard is to minimize the likelihood of life-threatening or debilitating injuries caused by head entanglements, strangulations or serious falls – while still engaging children with stimulating, creative and challenging play environments."

According to Health Canada, 18 playground deaths have been reported since 1982. Seventeen of these deaths were due to strangulation when drawstrings, skipping ropes, scarves, or loose clothing became entangled in playground equipment or fences, or when a child wearing a bike helmet got his/her head trapped in an opening in playground equipment. The other death was the result of a head fracture.[1] Additionally, each year an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 children in Canada are treated in hospital emergency departments for playground injuries[2] and, of those, about 1,700 will require admission to hospital.[3]

About the CSA-Z614 Children's Playspaces and Equipment Standard

The first edition of the CAN/CSA-Z614 Children's Playspaces and Equipment standard was published in 1990. CSA standards are living documents, reviewed at least once every five years as part of CSA's process of continual improvement. Standards are revised and refreshed as needed to address changing requirements and emerging technologies. New information and feedback from stakeholders and the general public is closely considered before each update or amendment. As the playspaces standard has evolved, each new edition has focused on updating requirements designed to help reduce life threatening and debilitating injuries.

Updates to the fourth edition of the Playspaces standard include an informative annex intended to help guide those wishing to design playspaces which are more accessible to, and usable by, children with physical disabilities such as mobility, reaching, and manipulation disabilities. The annex focuses on reducing or removing barriers and increasing opportunities for people of all abilities to grow and learn together through outdoor play. It is important to note that the annex is intended to be informative and non-mandatory and is only to be applied to new playspaces or renovations or retrofits.

The fourth edition of the standard also includes changes to the fall heights for elevated platforms. Each year thousands of Canadian children are injured in playspaces, mostly from falls. According to Safe Kids Canada, for children under five, head injuries account for one in every seven hospital admissions (14 per cent) due to falls from playground equipment. [5] In this 2007 edition, the Technical Committee has introduced changes to the fall heights for elevated platforms that recognize that falls from the decks often occur when children climb up and over protective barriers. The new standard also includes requirements for emerging play elements, specifically a new requirement for swings designed for multiple users, and

includes both Imperial and Metric measurements.

The CSA Playspaces Technical Committee is composed of volunteer members representing stakeholders likely to be affected by the standard, including representatives from the Canadian Child Care Federation, Health Canada, Canadian Parks and Recreation Association, Safe Kids Canada, Ville de Montreal, as well as various manufacturers and municipalities from across Canada. The committee was created using a balanced matrix approach structured to capitalize on the combined strengths and expertise of its members – with no single group dominating.

Compliance with all CSA standards is voluntary unless mandated by government or enforced by regulatory authorities. In regards to the Children's Playspaces and Equipment standard, it is at the discretion of government or regulatory authorities to determine if, and how, they will adopt the standard. The Children's Playspaces and Equipment standard is not retroactive and is intended to be applied only to new playspaces equipment and to additions and replacement parts of existing playspaces and equipment. CSA International does not certify playspaces or have a program to certify playspace inspectors. The CSA-Z614 Children's Playspaces and Equipment standard may be purchased online at www.shopcsa.ca, or by contacting CSA Sales at 1-800-463-6727 or sales@csa.ca.

[1]Health Canada, Product Safety Bureau, personal communication, October 1999; updated January 2005.

[2]This estimate is based on an extrapolation of sample emergency department data and assumes that injury patterns for playgrounds are similar across Canada. Data sources: Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI). Ontario Trauma Registry Analytic Bulletin: Sports and Recreational Injury Hospitalizations in Ontario, 2002-2003. Toronto: CIHI, 2004; and Health Canada, Child Injury Division, personal communication, October 1999.

[3]Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI), National Trauma Registry, Minimal Dataset. Hospitalizations data: numbers of injury admissions by age, sex, season and type of injury, FY 1999-2001. Unpublished data.

[4] Disability in Canada: A 2001 Profile, a publication of Social Development Canada.

[5]Zierler A, Warda L, Pless I. Playground safety in Canada: children's injury exposure and parents' knowledge of prevention. Poster presented at BC Injury Prevention Conference, Sydney, BC, May 2001; and at Canadian Conference on Injury Prevention & Control, Kananaskis, AB, October 2000.

About CSA

Canadian Standards Association (CSA) is a membership association serving industry, government, consumers and other interested parties in Canada and the global marketplace. A leading developer of standards and codes, CSA aims to enhance public safety, improve quality of life, preserve the environment and facilitate trade. To help people understand and apply standards, CSA offers information products and training. The Canadian Standards Association is a division of CSA Group, which also consists of CSA International for product testing and certification, OnSpeX for consumer product evaluation services, and QMI for management systems registration. For more information visit www.csa.ca

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