



# OSBIE

## Playground Triage

With the introduction in 1998 of the CSA-Z614 standard for Children's Playspaces and Equipment, owners of commercial play structures have been overwhelmed with a new awareness of the need to be familiar with and comply with the provisions of this standard and the subsequent revisions.

The arrival of the standard has also brought with it the perplexing, and sometimes hotly debated issue of where to begin to apply the standard, and what to do when revisions are made to the original standard.

So, where to start?

The best approach to any risk management issue is to develop a systematic approach to identify and analyze the risks, determine the best risk management strategy, implement the solution and monitor the results.

One such systematic approach is known as triage. Although triage is traditionally associated with the prioritization of military casualties, by applying its' principles to playground issues, the definition can be reworded to read:

"The sorting of playground equipment by a system of priorities which ensures that the equipment which poses the most serious dangers to users receives appropriate attention first."

Using this definition of playground triage can be an effective risk management strategy in reducing student injuries on school playgrounds. The following recommendations demonstrate how these principles can be applied to systematically identify, prioritize and address the issues related to CSA Standard compliance and playground equipment safety.

### (1) Risk Identification/Analysis

Often the most effective way to identify and analyze hazards or risk is by way of an audit or site inspection. Although qualified playground inspectors are recommended, either an inspector or experienced school board staff can conduct a preliminary inspection of the playground equipment to determine its age, condition and level of compliance with the current CSA Standard.

The equipment in service should be grouped into the following three categories:

- Category I – Equipment older than 15 years or Self-designed/built equipment;
- Category II – Equipment Less than 15 years old, but pre-dating May, 1998;
- Category III – Equipment installed after May, 1998

It is expected that most equipment grouped under Categories I & II will not be in compliance with the specifications of the current version of the CSA Standard. Keep in mind that no version of the CSA Standard **requires** a play structure to be removed simply because it pre-dates the current standard. If properly maintained, most Category II structures can safely serve the balance of their expected 18-20 year life span.

Although the Standard does not require removal of Category I or II structures, if injuries occur on these structures, the issue of Due Diligence and negligence on behalf of the school board will

certainly be placed under scrutiny. Questions will be posed to determine if the school board knew, or should have known, that these two categories of play structures did not comply with current safety standards and may have contained hazards that caused the injury to a student. Did the school board take all reasonable steps to assess and remove known hazards? Was the equipment being properly maintained?

Using Playground Triage as a Risk Management Strategy:

In determining whether the equipment in Categories I, II and III, as described previously, can be operated safely, a “triage” system of prioritization can be useful in identifying equipment that needs appropriate attention, and to determine what actions are required.

The three hazard priority levels for playground equipment are as follows:

- Priority I** - Hazards present which are life-threatening or permanently disabling;  
e.g. head entrapment, strangulation, structural integrity, fall height
- Priority II** – Hazards present which may cause non-disabling injury;  
e.g. pinch/crush/shear points, protrusions, inadequate ground cover
- Priority III** – Hazards present which may cause slight injury, or equipment not in compliance with current CSA Standard, other than those listed under Priority I and II.

Once the identification and analysis has been completed, then the appropriate risk management strategies can be identified and implemented, as illustrated on the following table:

<b>Triage Level</b>	<b>Category I</b>	<b>Category II</b>	<b>Category III</b>
<b>Priority I</b>	Remove Equipment	Repair/Maintenance	Repair/Maintenance
<b>Priority II</b>	Remove Equipment	Repair/Maintenance	Repair/Maintenance
<b>Priority III</b>	Maintenance	Maintenance	N/A

It is recommended that the Maintenance program noted in the table for Category I and II equipment be a Daily/Weekly, Monthly and Annual inspection program as described under the current version of the CSA Standard. Since all Category III equipment post-dates the implementation of the first edition of the CSA Standard in 1998, it is implied that the equipment would conform to whatever version of the Standard existed when it was manufactured/installed. Category I equipment with Priority III hazards should be scheduled for removal/replacement over a 5 year period, and can be operated safely until then with proper maintenance and inspection.

Monitoring

Once the risk management strategies are implemented, the monitoring process should consist of retaining the documentation of each of the daily/weekly, monthly and annual inspection reports, with noted deficiencies and copies of completed work orders to validate that the deficiencies have been corrected.

This documentation is valuable not only to ensure your equipment is being properly maintained, but can also assist in proving your organization took reasonable steps to ensure the playground was kept in a safe condition, should a law suit occur in spite of your best efforts.