

Top Tips to **avoid costs** & make play equipment **last**



From the RPII

RPII Annual Play Safety Inspectors offer cost-saving advice and top tips based on their vast daily experience of conducting annual safety inspections. They say: “Have a proper, regular inspection regime and ensure all inspections are undertaken by competent people. Repair early and maintain as necessary. Timely low-cost action now may save accidents, prevent equipment failure and excessive costs at a later date.

The RPII has three inspection levels. A daily or weekly visual check is a ‘Routine Inspection’ and a more detailed periodic ‘Operational Inspection’ is done monthly or quarterly. The important Annual Inspection should not be missed and can only be completed by one of the UK’s fifty-five, RPII Outdoor Play Annual Inspectors. However, approximately 1000 councillors or council staff or grounds maintenance staff are currently RPII certificated and registered to do their own Operational Inspections with around 2000 as Routine Inspectors undertaking the daily or visual check.

Top Tips

-  **Don't:** Install a play area and play equipment and then forget about it.
-  **Do:** Look after your investment. Inspect and maintain play areas regularly and routinely. Early intervention is the key to low-cost running and long life. Little and often can save big repair costs later. To quote the cliché; A stitch in time ...
-  **Do:** Set up proper inspection regime of Routine, Operational and Annual Inspections. Ask an RPII certificated Annual Inspector what inspection regime is required for each play area. It may vary with usage.

Top Tips continued...



Do: Have someone, probably in-house, responsible for Routine inspections; checking for damage, litter, graffiti and checking for vandalism. Train your people how to do routine inspections. Keep records and carry out recommendations. Ensure inspectors at all levels are current members of the RPII at the appropriate level. Routine inspections are important, cost the least but are frequently ignored.



Do: Be sure to have an Annual inspection which will highlight everything a council needs to know regarding the state of the equipment's structural stability, wear and tear. It predicts its durability for the next year. It gives playground managers lots of essential information on the quality and condition of the play equipment and playground.



Do: Ensure adequate budgets are available for maintenance and repairs. If left, they can lead to equipment failure and accidents. Cutting back could be false economy and more expensive later. Prevention is better than cure.



Do: Follow the manufacturer's recommendations. Lubricate, oil or grease bearing and bushes.



Do: Ensure repairs and maintenance as recommended by inspections are carried out, that worn components are replaced which may include bearings, bushes, chains or shackles, as required. Roundabouts can be the most expensive items to repair and yet telltale warnings (usually noisy when rotating) are often ignored resulting in a much higher repair cost when perhaps an early intervention would have been much cheaper.



Common Misconceptions



Most misconceptions in play are about danger. This is addressed by the Annual Inspection where the likelihood of an accident and the potential injury can be risk assessed. For example, appropriate, well-maintained safety surfacing provides protection from a fall. This highlights the importance of play surface maintenance which includes topping up and raking loose-fill materials. Misconceptions include the worry that children may run, trip and fall into moving equipment like swings or roundabouts but with proper surface inspection and maintenance these should stop trip hazards developing.

A very widely held misconception is that safety surfacing is for accident and injury prevention. It is not. It is designed and installed to prevent serious injury including injuries to the head from a fall which emphasises the importance of play surface inspection and maintenance.

Another wrongly held view is that once equipment has been installed kids will mess it up. However the main reason for deterioration is lack of maintenance of popular, heavily-used equipment.

Mistaken views include: "We have paid the money and installed the kit. That's it. Job done." Wrong! That is only the start. Regular inspection with a modest annual maintenance budget are essential. Getting it right before installation

The RPII recommends choosing a reputable manufacturer and designer, most likely to be a member of the Association of Play Industries (API), with good quality, long-lasting equipment which is unlikely to be the cheapest available. It is important to get this right before installation. Site selection is important and a play area 'idyllically located underneath trees' may lead to persistent problems of moss growth, slippery surfaces and potential algal growth.

In addition to the excellent play area design advice from the API and Play England, many RPII annual inspectors have the experience to assist greatly in contributing to and checking new play area designs before installation. This can help avoid later problems with post-installation inspections. Indeed missing the post-installation inspection can lead to problems when the first annual inspection is done and councils may then face remedial costs which could and should have been carried by the designer, manufacturer and installer as part of snagging before settling the final bill.

Top-most Tip

Ask the experts, ask an RPII Annual Play inspector. They are listed at www.playinspectors.com

Overmatter:

Fences & Gates

The best advice on fencing and gates is asking if they actually necessary. If they are then look after them or spend the money on more play equipment. Are dogs really such a nuisance that we have to spend some 15% of the playground budget on keeping them out and shouldn't parents with little children look after them so that cannot 'escape' from the playground? The majority of children using a playground are capable of looking after themselves – after all, they walked the dangerous streets to get to the playground in the first place.