

PLAYGROUND SURFACING MAINTENANCE





Proper surfacing is a must-have for any playground. Choosing a surfacing option that best fits your playground is vital, and whether you choose loose-fill surfacing material like wood mulch or pour-in-place rubber surfacing, regularly scheduled maintenance is crucial when it comes to ensuring the safety and longevity of your playground. In this guide, you'll find some helpful reference materials that pertain to playground surfacing, as well as tips and tricks meant to give you a clearer understanding of what playground surfacing is and what goes into maintaining it.

The **3 R's** of Surfacing Maintenance

✓ Rake

By frequently raking loose-fill surfacing, you can fill in areas with the most wear and tear and remove debris to prolong the life of mulch.

✓ Refill

Replenish loose-fill surfacing any time there is loss of product that does not provide adequate depths for fall height.

✓ Repair

Seal cracks and repair damage to unitary surfacing as you find it, otherwise the damage could get worse and result in a pricey replacement.

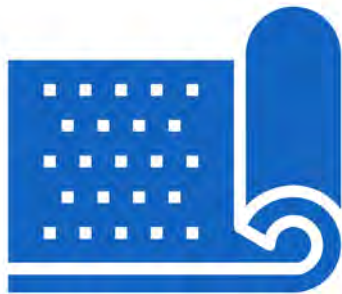


TYPES OF SAFETY SURFACING

Engineered Wood Fiber

Loose-fill wood mulch should be checked regularly to make sure it's loosely packed, covering all appropriate areas (especially fall zones surrounding equipment), and that its depth is maintained. Surface should be level and its depth should be able to attenuate falls from play equipment, and containment curbs should be kept firmly in place. Concentrated areas like slides and swings should be checked underneath and topped off with more mulch if necessary to maintain proper critical fall depths and accessibility.

3 ways to extend the life of WOOD MULCH



1. Wear mats: reduce the amount of wear and tear and displacement of loose mulch from on playgrounds by placing rubber mats under concentrated areas like slides and swings.

2. Drainage: having a drainage system isn't required, per say, but it's highly recommended to prevent deterioration caused by flooding and bacteria/mold growth.



3. Regular checks: wood mulch needs to be checked often to make sure it's topped off and not compacted to keep up to standards and prevent injury.



Rubber Mulch

Rubber mulch is a loose-fill option that is gaining a lot of popularity as a safe, environmentally friendly surfacing choice for playgrounds. Compared to wood mulch, it doesn't need to be replenished often, as it doesn't decompose or invite mold or insects. However, the play area will still need to be raked and topped off occasionally, especially around heavily concentrated areas, as kids at play can displace it outside of the play area. Consider the following when maintaining rubber mulch:

Compacting and Displacement

Leverage that rubber mulch has over wood mulch is that it virtually never compacts. It's also heavier and less likely to wash or blow away in bad weather compared to wood mulch. Installing proper barriers around the playground's perimeter is essential to keeping mulch in the play area, as displacement is a common issue at the playground edges.

Weather Conditions

Shredded rubber can withstand cold and harsh winters, as it's not prone to freezing. However, it may grow uncomfortably hot in the summer and care should be taken in very hot weather. Children should proceed with caution during hot summer days, and should always be wearing shoes and not treading barefoot on rubber mulch.

Heavy Use Areas and Top-Offs

Compared to wood mulch, rubber mulch does not have to be replenished as often. The amount of times to replenish does change depending on if rubber mulch is not bordered correctly or if you're losing too much to kids shoes. Concentrated areas should be checked more often in case these areas need to be topped off to keep up with safety standards and fall heights. Wear mats and water drainage is recommended to prevent kicking of material and flooding of play areas.

Cleaning Foreign Objects

Make sure you check rubber surfacing occasionally for any foreign objects, debris and litter to ensure children's safety while on the playground. Sometimes items can end up being hidden in the rubber, so doing some quick lookovers every so often is highly recommended.

Poured-In-Place Rubber

Poured-in-place rubber surfacing is a unitary surfacing option that's ideal for playgrounds. As opposed to loose-fill surfacing like rubber mulch, poured-in-place rubber requires far less manpower to maintain. There's a greater upfront cost to poured-in-place surfacing than loose-fill, but because you won't need to replenish the space with new materials, the cost over time will end up being less than if you were to use loose-fill materials. Below are some things to pay special attention to when maintaining a poured rubber surface:

Heavy Use Areas

Segments of the playground that are most frequently traveled, such as under swings or at the base of slides, are known as heavy use areas. As the name suggests, the surfacing in these areas will need to be more frequently inspected than others to prevent excessive wear and tear. If and when you encounter stains or other cosmetic issues, refer to your manufacturer's cleaning recommendations for guidance.

Foreign Objects

Loose debris can be hazardous on playgrounds, so it's important to always be on the lookout for trash and other foreign objects that may have found their way onto your playground. If and when you come across such objects, it's best to quickly and safely dispose of them.

Roll or Spray Coatings

To maintain the color and sheen of your pour-in-place surfacing, it's necessary to apply spray or regular roll coating. Roll or spray coating should be applied every 1-2 years, and the precise frequency of application depends on climate, how often your playground is used, among other factors.



OTHER SAFETY SURFACING OPTIONS

Rubber Tiles

General up-keep of rubber tiles is not as extensive as some other surfacing options, but there are some concerns and problems to look out for the older your rubber tiles get. While doing routine inspections, make sure to look between the spaces of the tiles for any objects that get lodged in between them. Hosing off the entire surface during monthly routine maintenance to remove loose debris, dirt and other foreign elements is recommended to prevent children from tripping and falling. A water pressure can be used as long as the pressure does not exceed 1,500 psi and the spray nozzle is no closer than 12 inches from the surface. Some staining may be possible with rubber tile surfacing, so using a 10-inch medium basin bristle scrub and mild household or commercial detergent is the best for getting out stains while the surface is damp.

Synthetic Grass

With some basic care and precautions, synthetic grass will maintain its shine and luster for years to come. Proper maintenance goes a long way when it comes to synthetic grass, and simply keeping the surface free of debris, grass clippings, and leaves using a leaf blower will contribute greatly to the longevity of synthetic grass.

Pea Gravel

As the name suggests, pea gravel surfacing consists of small, rounded stones that are roughly the size of peas. While pea gravel is often used outdoors on things like driveways, walking paths, and patios, it can also be utilized on playgrounds. Pea gravel is fairly low cost, even compared to other loose-fill surfacing options like mulch. At the same time, pea gravel will need to be raked and replenished periodically, and replaced entirely every few years. It can retain moisture and attract insects, so make sure you are raking frequently and removing trash and organic materials from the mix.





Every year in the US, nearly two-thirds of injuries sustained on playgrounds involve children falling onto unsafe surfacing. From inadequate fall protection to tripping hazards, shoddy playground surfacing can lead to numerous issues, including lawsuits, if not properly installed and maintained. Don't make the mistake of assuming you won't be one of the "unlucky" playground owners who gets sued; playground injuries have been settled in civil court for as much as 20 million dollars, and the number of playground operators sued for negligence has only increased year after year. By referencing the material in this guide, you'll make your playground a safer, more inviting place while simultaneously cutting down on the risk of injuries and subsequent liability.

More Playground Maintenance Tips Available At

PLAYGROUNDS.COM

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