



Parks and Recreation Newsletter, Summer 2012

Playground Sun Safety

by Sarah van Wezel and Jay Jensen

Landscape architects and designers are constantly faced with the challenge of designing safe and attractive play areas. One particularly important aspect is the need for shade and weather protection. The importance of adding shade to playgrounds has come to the forefront as daycare owners and playground designers realize the importance of sun protection, especially for children who are particularly susceptible to the sun's damaging effects.

Sun Protection – Need for Shade

Unprotected playground equipment can get too hot to touch during the summer months, which can lead to both children and adults being severely burned. In Cathedral City, California, the CBS Local 2 News staff took a laser temperature gun to measure playground equipment at Panorama Park when it was 115F degrees outside. The playground equipment and flooring measured 161F to 180F degrees. This provides an important reminder to not only cover the “top” of the equipment, but the surrounding play surfaces as well.



Tuscany Park, Henderson Nevada, Octagon Fabric Shade Structure. Courtesy USA Shade & Fabric Structures, Inc.

Equally troubling is that one of the most pervasive threats to children's health is also often overlooked—one that affects them every time they step outside into the sun. Children who are unprotected from the harmful UV rays of the sun could face skin cancer. See “Fast Facts about Skin Cancer” below.



Frisco Lakes Home Owners Association, Frisco Texas, Custom Fabric Sail Structure. Courtesy USA Shade & Fabric Structures, Inc.

Asset protection is an additional concern. UV damage to property and equipment presents serious problems for both facility

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managers and business. When equipment is protected, the quality and use of the equipment can be greatly extended.

Aesthetic Appeal

Shade options for areas where kids play or rest can include using the shade from the surrounding buildings, adding evergreen trees to provide shade year-round, or installing permanent shade structures made out of a variety of materials such as HDPE (high-density polyethylene) fabric, PVC (polyvinyl chloride), PTFE (polytetrafluoroethylene), vinyl, wood, steel, or combination of materials. Many shade structure companies offer engineering and design services to help landscape architects incorporate the structures into their design.



Township Fitness Center, Ridgeland, Mississippi, Custom Fabric Shade Structure. *Courtesy USA Shade & Fabric Structures, Inc.*

A priority in designing a playground or other recreation area is to make certain there is immediate shade coverage. In an open area, permanent shade structures are quick and low maintenance in comparison to trees. A great location for adding trees is in picnic/rest areas where ground maintenance is already needed on a consistent basis. Another option is to use existing building shade or permanent structures in combination with trees so that there is some immediate shade while the trees have time to grow.

Additional benefits of adding shade to a playground, splash pad, or picnic area is the overall aesthetic quality it provides.



Waterpark Ranch, Los Angeles California, SuperSpan Multi-Level Pyramid. *Courtesy USA Shade & Fabric Structures, Inc.*

Whether it is installing trees, a structure, or a combination of elements, adding shade can provide a “face lift” for many facilities and can greatly increase the hours of enjoyable usage by the children! Making shaded play areas no longer a luxury, but a necessity to include in our designs.

Fast facts about skin cancer:

- Children’s skin is especially sensitive to direct sunlight because they don’t have as many pigment cells as adults do. Children burn faster and cumulative skin damage starts with the first exposure. (American Academy of Dermatology (AAD))
- Experts say that one bad sunburn in childhood could cause skin cancer 30 years later. (AAD)
- The incidence of basal cell skin cancer in North America is going up by 5 percent a year. (AAD)
- A child born in 1994 now has a 28 per cent to 33 per cent lifetime risk of developing basil skin cancer. (AAD)
- Half of all cancers are skin cancers. Six out of seven skin cancer deaths are from malignant melanoma. Melanoma is more common than any non-skin cancer among people between 25 and 29 years old! (American Cancer Society)
- One American develops skin cancer every thirty seconds and over one million people in the United States will develop skin cancer

each year. Skin cancer kills one American every hour! (Columbia/HCA Healthcare Corporation)

• It is estimated that there were about 123,590 new cases of melanoma in 2011—53,360 noninvasive (in situ) and 70,230 invasive (40,010 men and 30,220 women). (American Cancer Society)

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