

SAFETY DIRECTOR BULLETIN

PLAYGROUND UNITARY SURFACING CONTRACTS BEST PRACTICES

As public playgrounds are upgraded or replaced, many playground owners opt for poured-in-place rubber surfacing, also known as unitary surfacing. Unitary materials are generally rubber mats and tiles, or a combination of energy-absorbing materials held in place by a binder that may be poured in place at the playground site and then cured to form a unitary shock-absorbing surface.

Unitary materials are available from several different manufacturers, many of whom have a range of materials with differing shock-absorbing properties. When deciding on the best surface materials, keep in mind that some dark-colored surfacing materials exposed to the intense sun have caused blistering on bare feet. Check with the manufacturer if light-colored materials are available or provide shading to reduce direct sun exposure.



Playground owners wishing to install a unitary material as a playground surface should request ASTM F1292 test data from the manufacturer, identifying the critical height rating of the desired surface. In addition, site requirements should be obtained from the manufacturer because some unitary materials require installation over a hard surface while others do not.

Lastly, the Safety Director recommends that the bid specifications for public sector projects should include a clause that requires the contractor to be responsible for monitoring the job site and the improvements on a 24/7 basis, until the agency formally accepts the improvements by way of a Resolution.

If the specifications contain this requirement, all bidders will be on notice and should include money in their bid for this activity (i.e., scheduling someone to be onsite during surface curing time to prevent accidental or intentional damage to the uncured surface). This will also make the contractor responsible for any damage that occurs until the agency formally accepts the project.