

SAND AND OTHER LOOSE FILL SURFACES

Sand and other loose fill surfaces are regularly used in playgrounds and are mentioned as surfaces in BS EN 1176 (the Standard for playground equipment and surfacing) which gives details on bark, wood chips, sand and gravel.

Concerns are, however, expressed from time to time that loose fill surfaces should not be used in children's playgrounds.

In my experience there are very rarely occurrences of fouling of loose fill areas by dogs and cats and in mainland European countries this is not regarded as a problem at all.

The possibility of broken glass or other sharp debris being hidden is less of a risk than is generally realised. If bottles are dropped onto loose fill surfaces they tend not to break and if they are broken lie on the surface and are clearly visible and so can be removed at the same time as other litter in the playground.

Broken glass can occur on any impact absorbing surface or indeed on tarmac, concrete or grass. In my experience it does not appear to present any greater risk on loose fill surfaces than on these other surfaces. It may actually be less risk as there is less chance of it breaking into smaller parts.

In nearly 20 years of inspecting hundreds of playgrounds each year I have yet to see a syringe on a playground so again the risk is very low.

There are obviously great benefits in terms of play value for sand being used in a playground. If it is used managers should ensure that they get the right type of sand as one that gives the best impact absorption is different from one which binds together to form sandcastles.

Clearly any playground can suffer from some determined vandalism where someone deliberately wishes to create a hidden hazard. Whilst this is always a possibility it is, in fact, a very rare occurrence. The effort taken to prevent such an occurrence occurring (when someone is determined to hide it) would be incredibly high and in my view not reasonably practicable.

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