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Playground and recreational areas - Framework for the competence of playground inspectors

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Playground and recreational areas - Framework for the competence of playground inspectors

Aires de jeux et de loisirs - Cadre définissant les compétences des inspecteurs d'aires de jeux

Spielplatz- und Freizeitbereiche - Kompetenzrahmen von Spielplatzprüfern

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European foreword

This document (CEN/TR 17207:2018) has been prepared by Technical Committee CEN/TC 136 “Sports, playground and other recreational facilities and equipment”, the secretariat of which is held by DIN.

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Introduction

During the process of reviewing the EN 1176 series it became clear to the CEN/TC 136/SC 1 committee that there is a broad spectrum of competence in inspectors of playground environments. With the specific elements involved in play, such as equipment, environment, children, etc., an inspection of a playground environment is not solely a "technical" inspection but also requires knowledge of how and why children of all abilities play from the inspector. Inspectors need to understand the way children play, interact, evolve and develop to be able to make informed, balanced decisions about the safety of the play environment.

EN 1176-1 states: *"Risk taking is an essential feature of play provision and of all environments in which children legitimately spend time playing. Play provision should aim to offer children the chance to encounter acceptable risks as a part of a stimulating, challenging and controlled learning environment. Play provision should aim at managing the balance between the need to offer risk and the need to keep children safe from serious harm."* The aim should be to provide as much play value as possible and as little safety as necessary.

In this vision on the safety of playground environments it is essential that the inspector doesn't only know the technical content of the related standards, but also understands why and how to make risk assessments and/or a risk benefit analysis.

After reviewing methods of inspections around the Europe, it seems there are three main principal ways in use:

1) Inspection of the entire play environment is including conformity of equipment and the extent of the impact attenuating surfacing area, maintenance defects, ancillary items and be combined with a risk assessment.

2) Checking the equipment and environment based on a risk assessment alone. This can be described as a global inspection of the minimal level of safety of the equipment and play environment.

3) Checking the equipment referencing the relevant standards and technical reports. Broadly this can be described as a 'conformity inspection'. This option specifically excludes the play environment because there is no standard available for it.

The recommended approach is the first, which is broadly applicable in Europe; it is acknowledged by authors of this European Technical report that cultural differences play an important role in the inspection process and outcome. Each member state should publish this Technical Report, the implementation of the guidance is determined at a National level.

Regardless to popularity of method three, checking the equipment without identifying hazards, undertaking risk assessment and/or risk-benefit analysis, is a very restrictive inspection. The outcome of this option can be in contradiction with the statement about risk taking in the introduction of EN 1176-1.

The way in which children play and the public perception of children's play varies from country to country and with this in mind it is vital that the inspector is aware of the cultural differences that exist. The inspector will need to be familiar with what is an acceptable level of risk or challenge for the country in which they are employed or contracted.

For example, there is a big difference in the approach on the subject of water in the direct neighbourhood of play environment in the Netherlands compared to other countries in the EU. This is a result of the never ending struggle in The Netherlands to acquire more space to live. And so building "on" or in the close proximity of water is a necessity. Children are educated from early age on how to deal with this potential danger in their daily lives and have from early age an elevated awareness of this danger.

Cultural and socioeconomic differences cannot and may never be an argument to withhold children from a beneficial risk/challenge while playing.

This document is based on the text contained within EN 1176 series and the working group accepts that there may be variations in working practices in different countries. Irrespective of established systems, inspectors need to have necessary competence to undertake the tasks.

The lack of safety knowledge by some product and layout designers cannot be compensated for by the expertise of inspectors. Operators responsible for several playgrounds need some level of knowledge as well. Installers will at least have correctly detailed technical documents to work with but a basic level of knowledge about safety could help to solve problems arising during installation. Manufacturers should have a high level of knowledge. In general, safety relates to everything from the inception of a playground project to the end of its lifecycle.

1 Scope

This framework forms a guideline for the education, examination and evaluation of the inspectors' competence concerning public playground and recreational sports environments. For each specific task an inspector may need to perform, this guideline describes the knowledge required and also sets out the basic level of knowledge necessary.

The standard EN 1176 parts 1 and 7 detail the different types or levels of inspections required to help provide a play environment that is suitable for children to play in. The different types of inspections demand different levels of knowledge; these are:

— routine visual inspection;

— operational inspection;

— annual main inspection;

— post-installation inspection.

As well as these inspections identified in the standard there are also other inspections or activities that are useful in helping to ensure the safe operation of a play environment:

— post-accident inspection;

— pre-installation consultation;

— mid-installation surveillance.

In this guideline there is a broad explanation of what these inspections are and how they should be performed.

This guideline doesn't cover the competence of staff conducting product certification.

Due to the variety of items that can be encountered in the playground environment this guideline can be used to evaluate an inspector's competence for the following equipment e.g.:

— playground equipment (EN 1176-1, –6, 1-10 and –11);

— roller-sport infrastructures (EN 14974);

— multi-sport arenas (EN 15312);

— outdoor exercise equipment (EN 16630);

— bouldering walls (EN 12572-2);

— portable and permanent socketed goals (EN 16579);

— parkour facilities (EN 16899);

— adventure playgrounds.

This Technical Report is not intended for:

— toys (EN 71 series);

— rope courses (EN 15567 series);

— inflatable play equipment (EN 14960).

2 Normative references

The following documents are referred to in the text in such a way that some or all of their content constitutes requirements of this document. For dated references, only the edition cited applies. For undated references, the latest edition of the referenced document (including any amendments) applies.

EN 1176-1:2017, *Playground equipment and surfacing — Part 1: General safety requirements and test methods*

EN 1176 (all parts), *Playground equipment and surfacing*

EN ISO 12100, *Safety of machinery — General principles for design — Risk assessment and risk reduction (ISO 12100)*