



## The new European standards for outdoor playground equipment

### Entertainment Sheet No 11

#### Introduction

This information sheet has been prepared for owners and operators of children's playgrounds as well as manufacturers, designers, importers and suppliers of children's playground equipment.

Before 1 January 1999, most children's playground equipment was supplied either to BS 5696, or to the German equivalent standard DIN 7926, or to other national standards. A new European standard BS EN 1176 *Playground equipment* has now replaced BS 5696 and another new standard BS EN 1177 *Impact absorbing playground surfacing - safety requirements and test methods* has replaced much of BS 7188. You should use these two new standards in conjunction with each other rather than in isolation. Parts of the amended standard BS 7188 *Methods of test for impact absorbing playground surfaces* remain to provide additional guidance on surfacing.

BS EN 1176 (published in seven parts) and BS EN 1177 are now available from the British Standards Institution.

This information sheet explains how you can use these standards to comply with health and safety legislation, principally the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974.

#### Structure of the new standard

BS EN 1176 is divided into seven parts:

- 1 General safety requirements and test methods.
- 2 Additional specific safety requirements and test methods for swings.
- 3 Additional specific safety requirements and test methods for slides.
- 4 Additional specific safety requirements and test methods for runways.
- 5 Additional specific safety requirements and test methods for carousels.
- 6 Additional specific safety requirements and test methods for rocking equipment.
- 7 Guidance on installation, inspection, maintenance and operation.

#### Differences between standards

There are many minor differences between the new standards and previous ones. Three are particularly relevant:

- the area of impact absorbing surfacing;
- the spacing between play structures; and
- the height at which you need to provide barriers within guard rails to prevent falls.

We cannot be certain the changes will affect the accident experience but the situation will be monitored by HSE, RoSPA and other interested bodies.

#### Compliance with legal requirements

All British Standards now include the statement 'Compliance with a British Standard does not of itself confer immunity from legal obligations'. This statement has arisen following the consumer protection case of *Balding v Lew Ways Ltd*<sup>1</sup> which established that a defendant had to show that they had taken all steps to avoid falling below the standard required by the Toy (Safety) Regulations 1989; complying with a relevant standard was not enough.

You should therefore not rely on compliance with BS EN 1176, BS EN 1177 and BS 7188 alone to determine equipment safety.

Under health and safety legislation you should carry out a risk assessment of playground equipment to work out what precautions are needed. Part of this assessment will involve deciding whether the equipment complies with the relevant standards. Sometimes you may need to do something more; for example, if the equipment predates recent standards, you may need to make some modifications or replace certain items. The playground's location may attract particular types of children, such as those who are disabled or highly active, in which case more frequent maintenance may be required because damage might occur more often and the consequences of using damaged equipment might be more serious. You will find it necessary to look at the site's accident history when deciding on additional safety precautions.

Increasingly, new equipment will be manufactured to the new European standards. However, even if the playground contains new items, you are advised to monitor accident trends and the state of the equipment, to see if any other measures are necessary.

### **Play Safety Forum statement on the European standards**

The new European standards for playground equipment and surfacing have caused concern. Some organisations were worried about the differences between the old and new standards.

To avoid further confusion, the members of the Play Safety Forum (National Playing Fields Association, HSE, RoSPA, Association of Play Industries, Local Government Association, PLAYLINK, Child Accident Prevention Trust, Institute of Sport and Recreation Management, and the Pre-school Learning Alliance) have made the following statement:

*We have considered the most significant differences between the BS and EN standards and we recommend that the EN standards are fully adopted. Accident trends will be monitored and resulting recommendations will be given to the European Standards organisation (CEN) via the British Standards Institution requesting appropriate amendments.*

### **References**

1 Balding v Lew Ways Ltd, Queen's Bench Law Reports March 1995 154 (only available from libraries attached to law schools)

### **Further reading**

*A guide to the new European playground equipment and surfacing standards* 1998 available from RoSPA Playground Office, 3 Earning Street, Godmanchester, Cambs PE18 8JD

*The new European playground safety standards Advisory note on application of European standards* 1998 available from National Playing Fields Association, 25 Ovington Square, London SW3 1LQ

*Five steps to risk assessment* INDG163 HSE 1995 ISBN 0 7176 0904 9

*The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations* 1992 MISC079 HSE 1998

The future availability and accuracy of the references listed in this publication cannot be guaranteed.

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HSE home page on the World Wide Web:  
<http://www.open.gov.uk/hse/hsehome.htm>

British Standards are available from: British Standards Institution, 389 Chiswick High Road, London W4 4AL  
Tel: 0208 996 9001.

This leaflet contains notes on good practice which are not compulsory but which you may find helpful in considering what you need to do.

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