



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO
REPORT TO THE CITY COUNCIL

DATE ISSUED: January 7, 2015 REPORT NO: 14-075
ATTENTION: Public Safety and Livable Neighborhoods Committee
SUBJECT: Playground Maintenance Program
REFERENCE: City Auditor Report: Performance Audit of the Park and Recreation Department's Playground Maintenance Program (July 2013)

REQUESTED ACTION:

This is an information item only.

BACKGROUND:

During the City Council meeting of June 10, 2014, the Council requested staff to return with a status report on the Park and Recreation Department's Playground Maintenance Program. This report discusses efforts made by the Department to improve playground maintenance and inspection practices and provides an update of Department efforts to address various recommendations made by the Office of the City Auditor from its July 2013 report.

DISCUSSION:

The July 2013 audit (see Attachment 1) identified three major findings related to the Department's Playground Maintenance Program. These items are:

1. Implement enhanced oversight of the playground inspection process
2. Create clearer performance standards related to playground inspection and repair to assess playground maintenance operations
3. Conduct a comprehensive and accurate assessment of playground equipment

The Office of the City Auditor provided several recommendations under each of these three broad findings. Since the June 2014 Council meeting, Department staff have made strides toward implementing each of the City Auditor's recommendations. This report provides a status update on each and defines key concepts. Playground inspections are conducted routinely (daily, biweekly, quarterly) to ensure safe maintenance practices and to identify hazards. Condition assessments are conducted as needed to evaluate age, play value, need for replacement, and accessibility. The Department provided this update to the Park and Recreation Board at its November 2014 meeting.

Finding 1: Enhanced Oversight of the Playground Inspection Process

To improve oversight of the playground inspection process, the Office of the City Auditor recommends that the Department: (1) train staff again on the policies and procedures for correctly completing the weekly playground safety inspection form and (2) standardize a playground inspection review process by requiring supervisors to visit playground sites and complete a written safety inspection form at least biweekly.

The Department currently inspects playgrounds on a daily basis. To implement the above two recommendations, as of January 2015, the Department has:

- Sent several employees to the California Parks and Recreation Society (CPRS) Certified Playground Safety Inspector (CPSI) training in March and May 2014 (nine [9] employees are currently CPSI's within the Department).
 - This training will be provided every three (3) years as the Department recertifies/certifies Playground Safety Inspectors
 - Staff will conduct tailgates annually
- Defined two tiers of inspections – high frequency and low frequency – as follows:
 - High frequency inspections are conducted by on-site and supervisory staff to identify and address basic safety considerations
 - High frequency inspection forms already exist and have been used by the Department for years (see Attachment 2)
 - Low frequency inspections entail a more comprehensive look at the playground equipment; this requires the supervisor and maintenance staff to inspect the equipment at the same time, providing additional opportunity for maintenance staff to be trained on technical aspects of playground inspections
- Developed new low frequency forms (see Attachment 3) and annual certified inspection forms (see Attachment 4) to be used by different classifications as recommended by CPRS, including:
 - On-site maintenance workers (visual high frequency inspection, every workday)
 - Supervisors of on-site maintenance workers (written high frequency inspection, biweekly)
 - Supervisors of on-site maintenance workers (written low frequency inspection, quarterly)
 - Department CPSI staff (written low frequency inspection, annually)
- Updated training materials based on the new playground inspection forms.
- Conducted a large-scale, lecture-style training session for all supervisors at the October 2014 supervisory meeting.
- Conducted a “hands-on” training course to allow staff to practice playground inspections in the park system.

Finding 2: Performance Standards Related to Playground Inspection and Repair

To assess playground maintenance operations, the Office of the City Auditor found that the Department should create clearer performance standards associated with playground inspection and repair by (1) clearly defining a “response,” (2) determining which division staff (onsite or specialized maintenance staff) is responsible for meeting the designated timelines, (3) defining playground equipment categories for repair, and (4) developing a guideline to explain the types of repairs considered “emergency” and “non-safety.”

To implement these four recommendations, as of January 2015, the Department has:

- Defined roles as follows:
 - Onsite staff includes Grounds Maintenance Workers, Recreation Center Directors, Area Managers, and others who provide daily maintenance of a park site within any of the Department’s five operating divisions.
 - Citywide Park Maintenance staff is a specialized work unit located in the Developed Regional Parks Division that maintains and repairs certain types of items within the park system, such as trees, aquatic features, turf mowing, and playgrounds. This group has a Playground Unit as well as an Intake Unit that receives service requests via the computer module Manager Plus.
 - Asset Management manages the Department’s inventory of park assets and capital improvement projects, including playgrounds. Park designers from this unit will assist both Onsite and Citywide Park Maintenance staff to identify and remedy playground concerns.
- Separated “small/minor” vs. “major” playground categories for repair as follows:
 - Equipment hardware that is readily available (i.e. S hooks, chain links, clevis, shackles, or other connecting fasteners) to Citywide Park Maintenance staff for repair is “small/minor” in category.
 - Equipment hardware not readily available (i.e. assembly parts specific to manufacture) to Citywide Park Maintenance staff or work that would require an outside vendor to do would be considered “major” in category.
- Defined hazard priority levels “emergency” and “non-safety” based on three factors:
 1. Possibility – the likelihood that users would come in contact with the hazard (in other words, answering “yes” to any of the below questions constitutes a possibility). Is the hazard:
 - Easy to access by vulnerable users?
 - In a heavily-used area?
 - A condition that can become worse easily or quickly?
 2. Probability – the potential that a child or other park patron might have an accident as a result of the exposure.
 3. Consequence – the likelihood that the result of the accident will be an injury?

Table 1: Definition of Hazard (Safety/Emergency and Non-Safety)

| Hazard Priority Level | Definition |
|------------------------------|---|
| Safety/Emergency | A hazard that possesses all three factors – possibility of contact, probability of an accident occurring, and high consequence of an accident |
| Non-Safety | A non-hazardous or non-safety related issue that is considered to be of a routine nature |

- Developed performance standards based on these roles as follows, 90% of the time:

Table 2: Playground Safety Performance Standards

| Standard | Responsibility | Timeframe (90%) |
|--|---|---|
| Upon identification of safety/emergency situation: | | |
| Lock off or barricade equipment | Onsite Staff | Immediately (same workday) after identifying hazard/safety risk |
| Enter service request for specialized repair or modification of equipment for hazard/safety risk | Onsite Staff | Immediately (same workday) after identifying hazard/safety risk |
| Repair or modify play equipment to eliminate hazard/safety risk | Citywide Park Maintenance (Playground Unit) | Within fourteen (14) working days (see notes below) |
| Upon identification of non-safety situation: | | |
| Enter service request for specialized repair or modification of equipment for a non-hazard/safety item | Onsite Staff | Within two (2) working days |
| Repair or modify play equipment to eliminate a non-hazard/safety item | Citywide Park Maintenance (Playground Unit) | Within fourteen (14) working days (see notes below) |

NOTES:

1. If parts are unavailable and require procurement, Citywide Park Maintenance (Playground Unit) and Onsite staff will collaborate to procure the necessary parts, and Citywide Park Maintenance (Playground Unit) will make the repair within 14 working days after receiving replacement equipment/parts.

2. If Citywide Park Maintenance (Playground Unit) is technically unable to make the necessary repairs, the Intake Unit will close the service request and will notify onsite staff within the initial 14 working days. In these cases, onsite staff will lock off, barricade, or remove the playground hazard/safety risk to ensure park patron safety.
 3. If Onsite staff, Asset Management, and/or Citywide Park Maintenance (Playground Unit) determine that the necessary repair in fact requires a capital improvement project, the Intake Unit will close the service request and will advise Asset Management of the need for a future capital improvement project. In these cases, onsite staff will lock off and barricade equipment. Citywide will remove the playground hazard and safety risk to ensure park patron safety.
- Developed specifications for an invitation to bid for playground rubberized surfacing with a goal of securing a contractor to provide surfacing repair services starting in spring 2015.
 - Worked toward implementing Manager Plus, a service request system that will be the Department's method to track response time for service requests and to report back success on the performance measures outlined in this report. Full implementation is anticipated by February 2015.
 - Provided and discussed the above described performance measures to the Park and Recreation Board in November 2014.

Finding 3: Comprehensive Inventory and Assessment of Playground Equipment

The Office of the City Auditor found that the Department should (1) create and maintain an inventory of playground equipment and surfacing at City playgrounds to be updated every three years or whenever equipment and/or surfacing are replaced, (2) develop a template for assessing condition of playground equipment and surfacing, (3) assess condition of all playground assets including surfacing over the course of five years, and (4) progress toward Enterprise Asset Management (EAM) compliance.

To implement these four recommendations, as of January 2015, the Department has:

- Identified Asset Management as the unit responsible for park condition assessments, including playground equipment and surfacing.
- Clarified that routine playground inspection (as described in the first finding) is not the same as a formal playground condition assessment, which is described in this section. Playground inspections are conducted routinely (daily, biweekly, quarterly) to ensure safe maintenance practices and to identify hazards. Condition assessments are conducted as needed to evaluate age, play value, need for replacement, and accessibility.
- Started to implement Manager Plus, mentioned in the response to Finding #2, to assist the Department in tracking locations where staff have replaced or repaired playground equipment and surfacing.

- Started to develop an inventory (see Attachment 5 for a sample data extract) of all playground assets in Manager Plus:
 - The annual Certified Playground Safety Inspector (CPSI) inspection was conducted in summer 2014. CPSI staff documented the condition of playground equipment and surfacing (using the form shown in Attachment 4 and described in Finding #1 above), including:
 - Type of playground equipment and surfacing
 - Condition of playground equipment and surfacing safety
 - Name of manufacturer and/or vendor of playground equipment and surfacing
- Initiated a program of Park Condition Assessments:
 - After a competitive request for proposals process, Kitchell Corporation was awarded the contract to conduct park condition assessments.
 - Park Condition Assessments will evaluate playgrounds, turf, certain athletic fields, parking lots, and other paved surfaces. This effort is in addition to the inspections described in the response to Finding #1.
 - The Department received initial, onetime funding for park condition assessments in Fiscal Year 2014, and additional onetime funds were allocated for Fiscal Year 2015. The Department will seek to make these allocations a recurring, permanent portion of the operating budget in Fiscal Year 2016 and beyond. Stabilization of these budget allocations is necessary in order to assess comprehensively the condition of at least 20% of all playground assets and surfacing each year, with all playground assets and surfacing assessed over the next five years.
 - Kitchell Corporation began a pilot project of an initial 30 sites in June 2014 with site visits. Staff has conducted iterative meetings and feedback sessions with Kitchell Corporation thereafter, with final reports on these 30 sites due in early 2015. This format should become the template for future park condition assessment reporting.
 - Under the leadership of the Public Works Department, staff intends to brief the Infrastructure Committee in early 2015 with a status update on all ongoing condition assessments, including those associated with facilities and park assets.
- Continued to move toward an Enterprise Asset Management (EAM) in accordance with Council Policy 800-16.
 - The Department is currently in Step 1 (Develop Asset Registry) and Step 2 (Assess Condition, Failure Modes) with its park condition assessments program, and the first wave of condition assessments will likely continue until Fiscal Year 2019, assuming funding availability.
 - Although the Department is not currently utilizing EAM software, Manager Plus will be implemented by February 2015 and will represent the Department's primary method to track and catalog service requests to park assets.
 - This effort is a precursor to EAM. Once the Department is scheduled for inclusion in the EAM, the Department anticipates that detailed service history about specific park assets in Manager Plus will be converted to EAM.

SUMMARY:

While the Department has always inspected playgrounds to ensure park patron safety, the Department is committed to improving based on the Office of City Auditor recommendations.

Over the past several months, the Department has made considerable progress in the ability to inspect, inventory, and assess playgrounds, including the following initiatives:

- In spring 2014, eight (8) employees received their California Parks and Recreation Society Certified Playground Safety Inspectors accreditations
- Certified inspectors have evaluated and inspected over 256 playgrounds (defined as an area with play equipment joined together by contiguous soft surfacing such as sand, fibar, and/or rubberized surface that is not separated by a hard surface such as a sidewalk or barrier) within the park system during summer 2014
- Intake staff have inputted every park playground into Manager Plus, the newly implemented computer based program that gives the Department an ability to track all playground service requests, repairs, and evaluations
- Certified staff will train onsite staff in both classroom and field environments related to playground safety and inspections

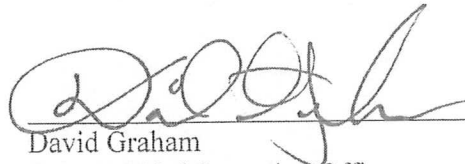
Staff hopes to continue with professional park condition assessments and eventual inclusion in the Enterprise Asset Management system for playgrounds. These efforts to improve playground safety and monitor playground equipment conditions will continue to ensure a safe place for residents of San Diego to recreate and play.

Respectfully Submitted,

Approved:



Herman D. Parker
Director
Park and Recreation Department



David Graham
Deputy Chief Operating Officer
Neighborhood Services Branch

HP/af/mt

- Attachments:
1. Performance Audit of the Park and Recreation Department's
 2. Playground Maintenance Program (July 2013)
 3. High Frequency Playground Inspection Form
 4. Low Frequency Playground Inspection Form
 5. Certified Playground Safety Inspector Form
 6. Playground Inventory Data Extract (Manager Plus)