

University of Northern Iowa

College of Education White Paper: National Program for Playground Safety (NPPS)
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NPPS was established in 1995 at the University of Northern Iowa with funding by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This funding lasted for ten years. Since that time, the program has become self-sustaining through revenue generation based on grants, sales of educational materials, and training services.

As the premier nonprofit organization in the nation focused on research, education, and training in the development of S.A.F.E. play areas, the organization has developed the S.A.F.E.TM Model to translate complex concepts to the general public. S.A.F.E. represents the four major elements of playground safety: Supervision, Age appropriate design, Fall surfacing and Equipment maintenance.

NPPS believes that every child has the right to play; that all children need to learn to play and play to learn; and that every child is entitled to safe, positive, nurturing, and fun experiences in the play environment. NPPS puts these beliefs into practice in a number of ways:

- * It serves as a child advocate on playground safety issues before government and regulatory organizations. It has influenced the American Society for Testing and Materials Standards regarding playground equipment and surfacing as well as the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission's guidelines for Public and Home playground safety. In addition, NPPS remains the major advisor for playground safety for the CDC, SAFE Kids International, and the National Safety Council.

- * It helps the public create, renovate, and maintain safe and developmentally appropriate play environments for children by providing products, services, and programs that are professional, well-researched, highly informative, and user friendly. The program has developed a National Action Plan, a Supervision Kit, an Assessment Kit for School Playgrounds, an Assessment Kit for Childcare Playgrounds, and various educational pamphlets and DVD's about S.A.F.E. In addition, the staff has written one book and over 150 articles for professional journals, and has presented at countless professional associations. They anticipate three new planning documents being available for childcare, school and park individuals in September, 2008.

- * It serves as a national resource for the latest education and research information about playground safety. In 2006, NPPS became the first national agency to provide on-line training for professionals in the areas of playground assessment, supervision and maintenance. Since 1996, NPPS has conducted over 35 sessions of a National Playground Safety School. In 2000 and 2004, staff members assessed over 3000 playgrounds throughout the United States in two comprehensive research studies. In addition they have conducted cutting-edge research about playground surfacing. Last but not least, NPPS has been featured on all the

national morning news programs, such as the Today Show, Good Morning America and Early Edition.

The NPPS has developed the largest and most comprehensive clearinghouse of information and resources about outdoor play area safety in the United States. It shares this information with the public through a 1-800 (273-PLAY) technical assistance hotline that has received over 35,000 calls and an award-winning web site (www.playgroundsafety.org) that has received over 2 million visits. NPPS employs undergraduate and graduate students to help with day to day activities including answering phones, creating news releases and publicity, record-keeping, fulfilling sales orders, and conducting research under the guidance of staff members.

In 1996, NPPS established National Playground Safety Day. The response was so overwhelming that two years later, the day was expanded to a week's celebration. During that week (the last week in April) schools, professional organizations, youth groups, and others from around the nation join NPPS in focusing on playground safety activities. In addition, NPPS annually asks for governors in each state to recognize the week through a state proclamation. On an average, NPPS receives 35 proclamations.

NPPS is led by Dr. Donna Thompson, Executive Director, Dr. Susan Hudson, Education Director, and Dr. Heather Olson, Operations Director. All three hold faculty appointments within the School of Health, Physical Education, and Leisure Services, College of Education.