

Dangerous playground structures will be replaced

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Ten playground structures targeted as dangerous by Hamilton city staff will be dismantled and replaced this year.

The playground equipment, all wooden and most of it at least 20 years old, is said to pose a serious threat to children who play on it.

“We've been looking at doing this for some time,” said Ross Fair, head of the culture and recreation department. “It's strictly for liability and safety reasons.”

Politicians and staff have set aside \$300,000 this year to replace the structures. New playgrounds, depending on the type and size, cost \$25,000 to \$45,000.

Under normal circumstances, neighborhood associations must kick in \$5,500 for new playground structures. However, the dismantling is being done on an emergency basis, and replacement doesn't hinge on people having the seed money now, said Ward 6 Alderman Tom Jackson, chairman of the parks and recreation committee.

“We'd still like to see the \$5,500 raised, but if a neighborhood can't come up with the money, that doesn't mean we won't put in a new structure,” said Mr. Jackson. “Also, the \$25,000 is a start. If a community has more needs or a different type of structure that costs more, a cost-sharing arrangement will kick in.”

The equipment being replaced doesn't meet Canadian Standards Association requirements which were revised in 1994, said Mr. Fair. Some of the equipment at the parks contains wood that is warped, has splinters, cracks and holes that pose hazards.

The new equipment order follows a playground tragedy in the City of York where a four-year-old was strangled by a skipping rope attached to a slide at a city-owned park this week.

Mr. Ross said a review of playground equipment was undertaken by several Ontario municipalities two or three years ago after two children were killed when their scarves became entangled in play structures.

The death of the four-year-old, part of a day-care group using the city park, has prompted regional social services staff in Hamilton-Wentworth to urge area day-care centres to inspect their playground equipment.

In addition, staff at Red Hill Day Care Centre, a regionally-operated facility, have been asked to scrutinize all its play equipment.

“We normally have staff inspect the playground and all other equipment at the centre once

a month," said Alderman Dominic Agostino. ``In light of what's happened, we wanted to be extra vigilant in making sure inspections were being carried out."

Equipment deemed dangerous

- McCulloch Park on the west Mountain, known as Brown's Park
- Parkdale Elementary School on Parkdale Avenue North
- Jackson Park, Jackson Street West at Dundurn Street South
- Gage Park, Gage Avenue South
- Carson Park near Upper Kenilworth Avenue and Mohawk Road East.
- Fonthill Park, Elmira Street and Upper Horning Drive
- Fairfield School, Barton Street East
- Woodlands Park, Barton Street East at Wentworth Street North
- Unnamed park, Burton and Douglas
- Beulah Park, Beulah Avenue