

## Lastman calls for safer play areas

Playground proposal meets with praise

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TORONTO ONT - Toronto children will play safer and have more fun if their mayor has his way.

Mayor Mel Lastman called yesterday for a report on the safety of playgrounds and replacement of substandard items. He also wants to build eight new water arks across the city.

The Canadian Standards Association says more than 10,000 Canadian children are seriously hurt in preventable playground accidents each year.

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The major culprit is concrete or asphalt surfaces that can cause serious injury when children fall. Alternatives are sand, grass, rubber and wood chips. Other problems are inadequate guard rails, equipment with sharp angles, playthings which are too close to other objects, and equipment in which children can get their hands, feet or heads caught.

The CSA released new standards for playground equipment in March that will be used as the model for city playgrounds. Mr. Lastman wants a city-wide inspection system for playgrounds.

His proposals mirror changes that North York Council made to playgrounds between 1995 and 1997. City officials now want to know whether the same upgrading is required in playgrounds across Toronto.

"Given the experience in North York, there's a need to find out the status of playgrounds across the rest of the new city," said Joe Halstead, commissioner of economic development, culture and tourism and the former North York commissioner of parks and recreation.

The cost of upgrading North York's 200 playgrounds was more than \$2-million over two years. The rest of the city has an additional 500 playgrounds.

The proposal to improve playground safety drew praise from Neil Semenchuk, president of the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association, which has teamed with the CSA to establish the Canadian Playground Safety Institute.

"I think it's terrific, and I wish every municipality would do it, and I wish the mayor of Toronto would get on the front page of all the papers and say, 'We're doing it, and we

challenge everyone else in Canada to do the same,' " Mr. Semenchuk said.

As for water parks, 14 have been built in existing North York playgrounds and "are the greatest thing in the world," Mr. Lastman said. They cost between \$50,000 and \$100,000 each.

"There are pumps with water coming out of the trees. There is water coming out of the ground, there are horses and kids on the horses throwing water at each other and they run through the water and it's phenomenal, they have a ball," Mr. Lastman said.

He said water parks are cheaper than swimming pools because they don't require lifeguards. He would like to have them in place by next summer.

The mayor's plan will be forwarded to the economic development committee for consideration at its meeting on Friday.