

# Safety concerns about playground equipment could cost city big bucks

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City councillors should find out in time for Christmas just what kind of playground equipment they'll need to put on their wish lists for the new year.

A December report from staff will spell out how much it will cost to bring the play structures in 102 city parks -- 77 city playgrounds and 25 on school property -- up to new industry standards.

They've already been warned any equipment installed before 1991 likely needs replacement. Retrofits might be needed on structures put in place since then.

And since city staff are unfamiliar with the new standards, it looks like a consultant will be handling the analysis. That could cost taxpayers about \$25,000.

The standards, released earlier this year by the Canadian Parks-Recreation Association and Canadian Standards Association, are aimed at improving safety and reducing the number of injuries suffered by children in playgrounds each year.

While the numbers aren't available for Burlington, it's estimated more than 10,000 children are injured at playgrounds across Canada each year.

"Slides, monkey bars and swings account for most of the injuries," Ross Stephen told members of the city's community services committee Wednesday night. "About 70 per cent of the injuries come from falls."

Stephen, manager of parks and open space, had no information on how many of the injuries result from equipment and how many from actions by the children.

The city has a regular inspection program now that sees playgrounds checked every four weeks, but the new standards will require a more detailed check.

The inspections annually eat up about \$12,350 of the parks and recreation budget in staff time. The new inspections are expected to double the cost. But it should drop in years to come when equipment is replaced or brought up to standard, he said.

Stephen said instead of hiring a consultant to do an annual inspection, he's hoping staff can be educated to do the work themselves. But only four training sessions were being offered across the country and all were filled within hours.

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