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Playground SUN Safety

By Sarah van Wezel

The importance of adding a shade element to playgrounds is emphasized as school leaders realize the importance of sun protection, especially for children who are so susceptible to the sun's damaging effects.

A rapidly increasing number of playground designers have found that fabric shade structures provide an ideal solution for both weather protection and aesthetic appeal.

Unprotected playground equipment can get too hot to touch during the warm-weather months, which can lead to children and adults being severely

burned. Equally troubling is that one of the most pervasive threats to children's health is also often overlooked, one that affects them every time they step outside into the sun. Children who are unprotected from the harmful rays of the sun could face skin cancer.

Skin cancer is the fastest growing cancer in the nation. Research indicates that most people receive as much as 80 percent of their total lifetime sun exposure during their first 18 years. One severe sunburn during childhood may double the risk of developing melanoma, one of the deadliest forms of cancer, later in life.

Upgrading the aesthetic appearance of your playground with fabric shade structures can provide a unique and permanent shade solution.

Ultraviolet radiation from the sun is the prime cause of this skin cancer. Frequent sunburns and intense sun exposure in childhood increase the risk of basal cell skin cancer in adulthood.

"Exposure to the sun is associated with all forms of skin cancer," said Sylvia

Leonard, senior director of the Cancer Control Policy - Canadian Cancer Society. "If people protect themselves while outdoors in the sun, it will result in substantial reductions in cancer cases a year."

A very common form of skin cancer usually seen in people over 50 years old is now being found in a younger group of people including teens and those in their 20s, according to the American Dermatology Association. More than 60,000 Americans will be diagnosed with basal cell skin cancer this year alone. Although it is the least dangerous form of skin cancer, basal cell carcinoma must be treated, since it will continue to grow, invading and destroying surrounding skin tissue, eventually causing disfigurement.

Playground safety was first officially addressed with the publication of the first Consumer Products Safety Commission's Guideline to Public



Playground Safety back in 1981. Safety on the playground is being further defined with the results of testing confirming the vulnerability of children under the age of five exposed to the UV rays of natural sunlight. Skin cancer is a very real concern. But, at the same time,

kids have a genuine need for play, and it is important for their health to develop active lifestyles at an early age. These shaded play environments are an answer.

Aside from the health aspect, an additional benefit of adding a perma-



ment shade structure to a playground area is the aesthetic quality it provides.

All over the United States, unique and colorful, permanent fabric shade structures are brightening the landscape at playground and recreational centers and everywhere shade and weather pro-

tection is required. The structures are not only effective in providing shade, but it often serves to provide a "facelift" for many facilities.

Fabric structures are increasingly popular with designers and architects for reasons such as:

- Fabrics are porous, lightweight and allow for cool air circulation
- Virtually unlimited design options and applications
- Aesthetically pleasing
- Cost effective
- Wide range of colors and translucency for lighting effects
- UV, heat, hail and harsh weather protection

Fabric shade structures can be designed in a variety of shapes and sizes. Tensioned fabric can be twisted, overlapped, and angled into a virtually unlimited array of forms. A number of overlapping sails can create an attractive accent and shaded shelter around playgrounds and parks. CSP

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