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INSTALLATION GUIDE

PLAYGROUND MULCH

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Installation:

Playground surfacing helps to protect children as they walk, run, jump, fall, and interact with their surroundings in the course of play. A range of materials are sold as playground surfacing. Some of these materials contain chemicals of concern for human health and the environment.

Why Choose Wood Playground Mulch?

Wood playground mulch is preferred for its ability to cushion falls and provide a soft landing surface, crucial for preventing injuries during play. It meets rigorous safety standards set by ASTM (American Society for Testing and Materials), specifically ASTM F1292 and ASTM F2075, ensuring it can absorb impact effectively.

Step 1: Preparation

- Remove existing playground surfacing, ensuring the ground is clear of debris, rocks, and roots.
- Install a proper weed barrier fabric across the entire area, overlapping seams by at least 3 inches to prevent weed growth through the mulch layer.

Step 2: Marking and Staking

- Begin by driving wooden stakes into the ground at various points across the play area. These stakes will help in measuring the depth of the mulch.
- Use a measuring tape to determine the desired depth of the mulch. This is typically 12 inches, depending on the specific safety requirements of your playground.
- Measure up from the ground and mark the stakes at the desired depth using a permanent marker or paint. This will guide you during the mulch spreading process.

Step 3: Spreading the Mulch

- Spread the wood playground mulch evenly across the entire play area using shovels or wheelbarrows. Start from one end and work towards the other to ensure consistent coverage.
- In high-use areas like under swings, slides, and climbing bars, slightly mound the mulch. This extra depth compensates for displacement caused by frequent use, maintaining the required safety standards over time.

Step 4: Finishing Touches

Once the mulch is spread to the marked depths, carefully remove the wooden stakes from the ground. Use a hand rake to smooth out the surface of the mulch. This not only improves the aesthetic appeal but also helps in achieving a uniform depth.

Accessibility:

Consider accessibility requirements when selecting and installing surfacing. To be ADA compliant, playground surfaces need to be firm, stable, and provide a level, accessible surface that allows for easy movement with wheelchairs and other mobility devices. Poured-in-place rubber, rubber tiles, and synthetic turf are generally considered the most accessible choices, while engineered wood fiber can be an option if properly installed.

Fall Zone:

Is the area under and around playground equipment where a child might land after a fall, and how to ensure it's properly surfaced. The fall height of a piece of playground equipment is the distance between the highest designated playing surface and the protective surface beneath it. The use zone should extend a minimum of 6 feet in all directions from the perimeter of the equipment.

Important tips when considering loose-fill materials:

1. Loose-fill materials will compress at least 25% over time due to use and weathering. This must be considered when planning the playground. If the playground will require 12 inches of wood chips, then the initial fill level should be 15 inches.
2. Loose-fill surfacing requires frequent maintenance to ensure surfacing levels never drop below the minimum depth. Areas under swings and at slide exits are more susceptible to displacement; special attention must be paid to maintenance in these areas. Additionally, wear mats can be installed in these areas to reduce displacement.
3. The perimeter of the playground should provide a method of containing the loose-fill materials.
4. Consider marking equipment supports with a minimum fill level to aid in maintaining the original depth of material.
5. Good drainage is essential to maintaining loose-fill surfacing. Standing water with surfacing material reduces effectiveness and leads to material compaction and decomposition.
6. Critical height may be reduced during winter in areas where the ground freezes.
7. Never use less than 12 inches of loose-fill material except for shredded/recycled. Shallower depths are too easily displaced and compacted.
8. Wood mulch containing chromated copper arsenate (CCA)-treated wood products should not be used; mulch where the CCA-content is unknown should be avoided.

Maintaining Loose-Fill Surfacing:

Regular maintenance is crucial to ensure the effectiveness of the wood playground mulch. Loose-fill surfacing materials require special maintenance.

Periodic Adjustment:

The following are key points to look for during regular checks of surfacing:

- **Areas under swings and at slide exits**. Activity in these areas tends to displace surfacing quickly. Rake loose-fill back into place.
- **Pooling water on mulch surfacing**. For example, wet mulch compacts faster than dry, fluffy mulch. If puddles are noticed regularly, consider addressing larger drainage issues.
- **Frozen surfacing**. Most loose-fill surfacing that freezes solid no longer functions as protective surfacing. Even if the first few inches may be loose, the base layer may be frozen and the impact attenuation of the surfacing may be significantly reduced. It is recommended that children not play on the equipment under these conditions.

Inspection:

High-use public playgrounds, such as child care centers and schools, should be checked frequently to ensure surfacing has not displaced significantly, particularly in areas of the playground most subject to displacement (e.g., under swings and slide exits). This can be facilitated by marking ideal surfacing depths on equipment posts.

Material Maintenance:

Displaced loose-fill surfacing should be raked back into proper place so that a constant depth is maintained throughout the playground. Impact attenuating mats placed in high traffic areas, such as under swings and at slide exits, can significantly reduce displacement. They should be installed below or level with surfacing so as not to be a tripping hazard.