



QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

PLAYGROUND SURFACING

All playground surfacing falls into two broad categories. It can be loose fill, such as wood chips, engineered wood fiber, shredded rubber and pea gravel, or unitary, such as poured-in-place, rubber tiles and synthetic turf, just to name a few. While there is no one perfect playground surfacing material, each has advantages and disadvantages. If districts do their research and work with established playground vendors, they can find the surfacing that best fits their needs and budgets.

LOOSE FILL

WOOD CHIPS

Pros: One of the most inexpensive surfacing options on the market. Can provide good fall attenuation if installed properly with good drainage.

Cons: Non-ADA compliant and quality of chips varies greatly by vendor. Large chips can create safety hazards.

ENGINEERED WOOD FIBER (EWf)

Pros: Far less expensive than unitary surfacing and provides good fall attenuation if installed and maintained properly. Can be ADA compliant if certified by the supplier and relies on proper installation and maintenance.

Cons: Requires an effective drainage system and continuous maintenance to maintain fall protection and ADA accessibility, and the material needs to be replenished periodically. Not suitable for sloped surfaces.

SHREDDED RUBBER

Pros: Is less expensive than most unitary surfacing and does not break down like engineered wood fiber.

Cons: Same installation requirements as EWF, with less need for replenishing. Initial cost is higher than EWF.



PEA GRAVEL

Pros: Less expensive than unitary surfacing. Does not break down, therefore requires less maintenance and replenishing.

Cons: Is not ADA compliant and is only rated for fall protection up to 5 feet. Should not be used around structures with fall heights greater than that.

UNITARY SURFACING

POURED-IN-PLACE RUBBER

Pros: Can provide excellent fall attenuation and is 100% ADA complaint if installed properly. Is available in a wide variety of colors and designs and requires little maintenance.

Cons: Is more expensive than loose fill surfacing, and its performance is critically dependent on the installation. It can require some repair over time by a qualified contractor. It is important to use an established vendor with a good warranty.

PRECAST TILES

Pros: Can provide excellent fall attenuation and is 100% ADA complaint if installed properly. Is available in a wide variety of colors and designs and requires little maintenance.

Cons: Is more expensive than loose fill surfacing, and its performance is critically dependent on the installation gaps. Cupping can be an issue if not installed properly. Tiles should only be installed by the manufacturer or manufacturer certified installer. They can require some repair over time by a qualified contractor. It is important to use an established vendor with a good warranty. Dark colors can become burn hazards in certain climates and locations.

SYNTHETIC TURF

Pros: Can provide excellent fall attenuation and is 100% ADA complaint if installed properly. Is available in a variety of colors and designs and requires little maintenance.

Cons: Is more expensive than loose fill surfacing, and its performance is critically dependent on the installation. Seams can become trip hazards if not installed or repaired properly. Tiles should only be installed by the manufacturer or manufacturer certified installer. They can require some repair over time by a qualified contractor. It is important to use an established vendor with a good warranty. Dark colors can become burn hazards in certain climates and locations.

Questions? Contact PACE Risk Management at riskmanagement@sdao.com.