

EUROPEAN PLAY SAFETY FORUM MANIFESTO

August 2005

It is universally recognised that children have a right to play. Play is essential in every child's life. Whilst it is valuable simply in its own right, it is also where children rehearse and make sense of their experiences. One vital aspect of play is how to manage and also enjoy risk taking.

European Play Safety Forum (EPSF)

The EPSF was established in 2003 to provide a forum for examining the issues around the balance between safety, risk and the opportunities for children to play and to reach consensus about them. The membership is drawn from a wide range of organisations and individuals across Europe concerned about the issues of play and safety. The forum is autonomous, independent and operates by consensus.

Scope

We are concerned with all outdoor spaces which are accessible to the public and therefore, by definition, places where children will play. We do not include domestic situations or mechanised amusement parks.

Our Aim

The opportunities for children to play are influenced by a number of factors. Amongst these are concerns for the safety and welfare of children. While the need for prevention of irreversible injury and fatality remains, there is also a need to find and promote the appropriate balance between play value, safety and risk in order that the opportunity for and quality of play in Europe can be improved.

Our Concerns

- That the application and understanding of safety rules and standards has had an effect on the quantity and quality of play provision that is offered to children across Europe.
- That decisions by adults about children's play are made in isolation from other factors affecting their lives.
- That there is a danger that the pursuit of a culture of blame and compensation results in discouraging Local Authorities from providing any or adequate play facilities.
- That there is a danger that some actions taken in the name of accident prevention lead to overprotection and a reduction of children's opportunities for managed risk taking.

What Needs to Be Done

- Promote ways to help play providers best serve the children in their communities.
- Promote broad-based, informed judgements reflecting the balance between play value, risk and safety.
- Challenge those actions that would disturb the balance between play value, risk and safety.
- Identify the ways in which the interpretation of safety issues is frustrating children's opportunity to play freely.
- Argue in favour of managed risk taking and dispelling the myth of absolute safety.
- Make it clear that there are more elements to be considered in the provision of play than technical safety expertise.
- Promote interesting and exciting play provision through more flexible application of the rules relating to safety thus encouraging children's development.
- Consult with children about their perceptions concerning play and risk and the way in which adults are handling it.
- Carry out research to inform good practice.

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Intended Audience

All those concerned with or affecting play provision of any kind. This includes, amongst others: European, national and local authorities; architects and planners; health and education professionals; voluntary organisations; parents; play equipment manufacturers; the legal profession; politicians; insurers; inspection agencies; and the media. Also included are those people or organisations which have influence over other settings and environments where children play, such as child care provision, schools, parks and public open spaces.

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The EPSF was established by the Federation of European Play Industries (FEPI) which continues to host the meetings.

