

A Guide to Specifying and Selecting Play Surfaces

Who's key to choosing the right play Surface? You are!



It's a fact – if you need to specify or buy a playground surface, the responsibility for getting it right rests with you. And it can be hard to find a product that ticks all the boxes you are expected to satisfy. You need a surface that will be:

- ✓ **Cost effective to install**
- ✓ **Long-lasting and durable**
- ✓ **Meets rigorous safety standards**
- ✓ **Attractive to children!**

Making sense

Our key aim is to promote best practice amongst specifiers and buyers to ensure best value in the purchase and installation of safer surfacing.

Where do you start?

Here at www.safersurfacing.info, we understand your dilemma – and we are here to help you make sense of all the information out there, and to help you make an informed decision on which surface you should be buying for your play area.

This Guide is packed with information to help you through the various stages involved in specifying and selecting the right surface for your needs. We highlight the key issues you must consider before you purchase your next playground surface, with the minimum of technical jargon!

Choosing your surface.



Not so long ago, choosing a surface for a playground or play area was easy! But when the realisation dawned that safety was paramount when designing areas for children, a plethora of materials were introduced. You need to make sure that you make the right decision - a decision that has become even more complicated!

What types of surface are available to me?

What are the elements of a good surface?

What should I be looking for in a supplier?

What are the likely costs I will have to face?

So – what's the answer?

What types of surfaces are available to me?

Well, as you are aware, there is a wide choice of surfaces available for children's play areas – but what are the pros and cons?

Grass is a great natural surface, and from a safety point of view, it can absorb minor impacts adequately. However, weather affects the suitability of grass – too wet, and it's a mud-bath; too hot and dry and you might as well have concrete! Maintenance is another key factor with grass – endless mowing can quickly eat up maintenance budgets.

Sand is another favourite – especially with children! It provides great play value, but can be a nightmare to keep clean and tidy, and has the ability to turn up in the most unusual places! Again, maintenance costs can creep up – you need to constantly check the area for buried rubbish and other nasties – children are not the only terrors attracted by sand!

Choosing your surface.



Bark is another natural product, and although it is slightly more manageable than sand, it does not rate highly on the hygiene score, and will create maintenance costs of regular cleaning and topping-up.

Wet-pour is a product that as indicated by the name, is wet when installed, but then dries to a porous, solid surface. It provides a strong, durable, low-maintenance and impact-absorbing surface which can be laid in any shape and size with no joins, and comes in a variety of colours, all of which make it a perfect choice for children's play areas.

Rubber Tiles are pretty easy to lay and their lifespan is good. They are cheaper than wet-pour and so may suit a low-budget project. However, over recent years, they have become the target of vandalism and so you could find yourself facing the costs of repair. They are also prone to lifting, which will cause a tripping hazard, and may become costly in terms of on-going

maintenance. Also – they do not offer the flexibility in terms of design, colour and play value of wet-pour products.

Carpet is a fabric like treatment that is generally good value, although wear and tear can be a problem in busy play areas, and to maintain its appearance, regular brushing is required – so on-going costs can become an issue. This surface is also prone to vandalism – another area of creeping costs, and on-going repairs, which can detract from the overall appearance.

What are the elements of a good surface?



Without getting too technical – there are a number of key elements that you should be looking for:

- ✓ **For play areas – safety has to be high on the list.**
- ✓ **In terms of cost – the surface should be durable and low-maintenance.**
- ✓ **Ease of installation and flexibility of design – allow your imagination to run free without the constraints of construction!**

Scratch the surface – see what's underneath!

Get to know the real make-up of the surface you choose. Ensure it is manufactured to high standards, taking into account such aspects as the level of resistance to abrasion, indentation and slipping when wet and dry.

Look out for the drainage capability of the surface. It's no good having a play area that will be closed due to standing water!

Consider the requirements of the foundation upon which the surface will be laid.

The preparation costs for some surfaces may outweigh any 'savings' on lower-cost products.

Keep an eye on the planet

Some surfacing products are made from natural or recycled components – such as rubber from tyres, and in some cases, from recycled sports shoes! So not only are you providing a great play area for children, but you will also be doing your bit to reduce the impact on the environment.

What should I be looking for in a supplier?



When you are planning to install a new play area – the choice of supplier is just as important as the choice of surface! Unfortunately, making a bad choice of supplier can be a very costly mistake, so here we give you a few pointers on what to look for in your surfacing supplier.

Reputation

Get references – talk to past customers regarding the installation and how good the on-going service has been. Visit sites installed by the supplier and check the standard of the work. Choose a recent site and one that has been installed 3 or more years.

Ensure the supplier belongs to the key industry trade associations e.g., the Association of Play Industries (API), and the Sports and Play Construction Association (SAPCA). Members can be found on the association websites (www.api-play.org and www.sapca.org.uk).

Request to see copies of all Test Reports and Safety Certificates the supplier claims to hold. Check that they are still current – standards are improved on a regular basis, and this will prove your supplier keeps abreast of current legislation.

Expect a minimum 5 year guarantee for wear and tear, materials and workmanship. This reflects the company's confidence in their level of service and the products.

Service

Make sure that the supplier carries out a full on-site inspection. This ensures the supplier understands your requirements, and prevents any surprises later in the project!

Obtain a full written proposal and cost estimates and make sure that you understand all aspects of the project – what your responsibilities are, what the supplier is responsible for, and where you are not sure – go back to the supplier and get a full explanation.

Ensure that the supplier can meet your design requirements. Some wet pour suppliers can provide mounds, hills, spheres etc with its wet-pour but others can't. Choose carefully to maximise the play potential of the area.

If other play equipment is being installed at the same time as the surfacing – ensure that your supplier is experienced in working with third parties.

Only use a supplier that will provide after-sales inspection, maintenance and repair services. Find out what the likely costs are, and factor these costs into your budget.

What should I be looking for in a supplier?



Quality

Ensure that the surface being specified meets the specified safety regulations for your play area.

Check on the life-expectancy of any colours included in the design – some colours fade more quickly than others.

Use a supplier that only uses its own installation teams, not contractors. You will get a far better level of service, and a better finished play area!

Stability

Check how long the supplier has been in business, and if possible, visit their head office. This will give you a good idea of the type of company you are dealing with.

Carry out a financial check on the company – the play market is at best volatile, so this is a worth while exercise given the current economic climate.

On-site

Ensure that you will have the services of one dedicated Project Manager for the duration of the work. Also ensure that there will be one on-site contract manager through the project.

Check on the supplier's policy regarding the CRB checking of their site staff.

Check that the supplier provides a proper edge finish in line with British Standard guidelines. Poor edging can lead to long-term maintenance issues.

Check that the supplier has made provision for the securing of the installation site until the surface becomes fit to walk on and that they accept liability for that period.

Environmentally-friendly

If being environmentally-friendly is a key driver for your choice, ensure that the product is manufactured using recycled or natural materials. In fact – using recycled rubber makes the product more durable – so you are getting the best of both worlds!

What are the likely costs I will have to face?



When considering the costs of surfacing, you need to think about both the initial cost of the supply and installation of the surface, and also the on-going costs of future maintenance. It is all very well to feel pleased at a low initial out-lay, but if you are then going to be continually paying for on-going maintenance to keep the surface in good condition, the initial savings will soon be lost.

Also, ensure that adequate budget is allocated to the surfacing in the first place. Don't leave this vital part of a play project to the play equipment company to decide. It is your responsibility to ensure you are buying the best value surfacing – don't leave it to chance!

Initial Costs

When considering initial costs – look at what preparation will be required for the type of surface you choose. Some can be laid on existing grass or macadam, or you may need to factor in the cost of specialist ground preparation – digging out and laying stone foundations etc. The preparation required may be determined by the safety levels required as well as the type of surface you select.

Other costs may include the project management of the installation, any other specialist equipment needed etc.

On-going Costs

In the Choosing your surface section, we have examined a number of available surfaces – but several of those itemised have a very high on-going maintenance cost – for example if you opt for bark or sand - someone has to be employed to weed the area, clean out natural nasties, clean up after humans, dogs, cats etc. Where tiles are used, these may lift and cause tripping hazards, and are easily vandalised.

So, consider your choice of surface very carefully, and factor in all the on-going costs, and headaches that some surfaces may bring!

So, what's the answer?



Having delved below the surface of the complexities involved in analysing the options available to you when choosing the right surface for your requirements, where do you go now?

If you have read all the information in this Guide, you are better equipped to understand what you need to be looking out for, what needs to be included in your costings and have an idea of the sort of questions you need to ask prospective suppliers.

But what surface is best for your play area? Well, that depends very much on your unique requirements!

However, there is a surface that really stands out from the rest because it is:

- ✓ **The most cost-effective**
- ✓ **The best in terms of Health and Safety**
- ✓ **The most aesthetically pleasing**
- ✓ **The most flexible solution ...and that surface is the wet-pour solution.**

Benefits of Wet-pour Surfaces?

Wet-pour comes in a variety of colours and is totally flexible – allowing you to design any size/shape of play area imaginable! The impact-absorbing, slip-resistant surface is strong and durable and on-going maintenance costs are minimal. Because it is laid as one continuous surface, there are no tripping hazards, and it can be laid right up to existing equipment supports, meaning that there are no unprotected areas.

Wet-pour can be laid to a variety of thicknesses, providing the exact Fall Height specification you require, so is highly recommended from a safety point of view.

The extremely durable nature of this surfacing can withstand years of use in children's play areas – and retains its good looks at minimal costs – making it the surface of choice for any playground.

How wet-pour surfacing works.

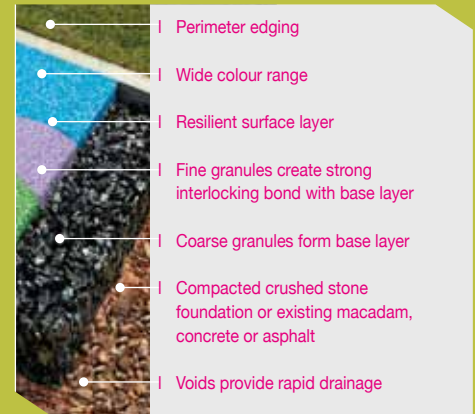


Wet-pour is a continuous, joint-free porous material made from rubber granules and polyurethane binders.

The rubber granules may be either synthetically manufactured – known as EPDM granules, or recycled rubber, such as truck tyres – this is known as SBR. Usually, there will be a combination of both types – the coloured layer of the surface tends to be manufactured using EPDM. But do seek out those manufacturers who maximise the recycling element of production. One manufacturer – Playtop – even uses recycled Nike trainers for some of their surfacing – a great selling point for children's play and sport areas!

Wet-pour is mixed on-site and is laid as a wet product (just as the name suggests!). This is what gives this surfacing the maximum benefits in terms of shape, size and colour design. Just let your imagination run wild!

The wet surfacing can be laid on any surface, including existing tarmac or concrete, or on a purpose-built base. The surface is made up of different layers, as shown in the diagram.



Always ensure that the supplier you choose will lay the wet-pour to at least this level of specification. Check their documentation to ensure this is what you will get.

Surface safety first.



Safety is paramount when considering any public area – and especially when you are specifying play areas for children. You are responsible and accountable for specifying a safe surface - make sure the surface meets all safety requirements.

There are European (EN), American (ASTM) and British (BS) Standards that should be considered when specifying the requirements for the new surface of a play area. Different surfaces will provide varying levels of safety protection and you need to ensure that the surface you choose meets the appropriate standards you will be expected to meet, for the type of play area you are providing.

Things to consider include:

Fall Height

Depending on the play equipment already in place, you will need to ensure that the surface specified meets the Critical Fall Height of the tallest piece of equipment in situ. Look for compliance with existing standards EN.1176:2008 and EN.1177:2008. To assess the Critical Fall Heights and to calculate the

thickness of play surfacing visit www.safersurfacing.info

Head Impact Criteria (HIC)

Different thickness of the surface will provide varied HIC. Ensure the surface you choose meets the standard you need to comply with. Visit the play safety section of the RoSPA website (www.rosipa.com) for details.

Slip resistance

Ensure that the surface you choose will not become a wet or dry slip hazard.

Resistance to indentation and ignition

Visit www.safersurfacing.info for an example of test results on wet-pour surfacing.

Ensure that the supplier understands your requirements and they can provide you with copies of test certificates that prove their products comply with current standards.

Surfaces built to last.



The site preparation, installation and depth of the surfacing you specify will dictate the standard of safety provided by the surface. It is up to you to ensure that the specification offered by the supplier meets your requirements. This is where the reputation of your supplier is paramount; always ask for certificates and inspect previous sites installed before you finally select your supplier.

Things to consider include:

Existing hard surfaces

Will the new surfacing need to go over an existing surface? Most wet-pour surfacing will go directly onto tarmac, concrete or asphalt providing it is in sound condition.

New construction

If it's a new site then look for wet-pour companies that can lay it directly onto a crushed stone foundation. It doesn't have to have an expensive engineered structural layer.

Perimeter detail

Ensure the play surface is going to be retained by quality perimeter edging.

Want more technical details about construction?

Visit: www.safersurfacing.info

Want to see a playground surface being installed?

Visit: www.safersurfacing.info

Want to produce a specification sheet and Bill of Quantities?

Visit: www.safersurfacing.info

To download the SAPCA Code of Practice for the installation of wet-pour play surfacing visit www.sapca.org.uk

Flexible flooring.



Wet-pour comes in a variety of colours and is totally flexible – allowing you to design any size/shape of play area imaginable! And it isn't just for indoor and outdoor playgrounds, wet-pour is also ideal for:

- ✓ **Golf walkways**
- ✓ **Paths**
- ✓ **Bridges**
- ✓ **Multi sport areas**
- ✓ **Helicopter landing pads**
- ✓ **Rooftops**
- ✓ **Exhibition flooring**

Useful organisations.



The following organisations may be useful for further information:

Big Lottery Fund – Tel: 0845 4 10 20 30 www.biglotteryfund.org.uk

BSI – Tel: 020 8996 9001 www.bsi-global.com

Fields in Trust – Tel: 0207 427 2110 www.fieldsintrust.org

Nike Grind – www.nikereuseashoe.com

Play England – Tel: 020 7843 6300 www.playengland.org.uk

ROSPA – Tel: 0121 248 2000 www.rospace.com

Sport England – Tel: 08458 508508 www.sportengland.org

Sport Scotland – Tel: 0141 534 6500 www.sportsscotland.org.uk

Sport NI – Tel: 028 9038 1222 www.sportni.net

Sport Wales – Tel: 0845 045 0904 www.sportswales.org.uk

API – Tel: 024 7641 4999 www.api-play.org

SAPCA – Tel: 024 7641 6316 www.sapca.org.uk

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