

Playground Mulch 101

Playgrounds offer kids the chance to stay active, explore, and develop both physically and socially. Playgrounds offer caregivers a chance to connect with their children in meaningful ways and when they are at school, having something to safely climb on, jump off of, and explore, allows kids to be more focused and engaged with their schoolwork. One of the benefits of having a commercial playground is to provide children with the opportunity to engage in risky play in a safe environment.

We believe in the power and importance of play and if you have a playground, you do too.

Once the playground is installed, it becomes the responsibility of the community manager, HOA, school, or other owner to ensure it remains safe, including having proper safety surfacing.

Playground Safety Surfacing Options

There are several options for safety surfacing, with the most commonly requested being: Playground Mulch (engineered wood fiber), Rubber Mulch, Poured-in-Place, Bonded Rubber, and Artificial Turf.

Each kind of safety surfacing has to meet specific specifications and undergo testing to determine the amount needed for various types of playground equipment.

For example, having the proper amount of 12" of engineered wood fiber (EWF/playground mulch) is crucial in preventing serious injury and fatalities.

Ensuring the right depth and coverage of safety surfacing helps absorb impact and provides a safer environment for children to play.

Did you know that falls are the number one cause of injury on playgrounds?

According to the Consumer Product Safety Commission, more than 200,000 children are hospitalized each year due to playground injuries.

The National Safety Council reports that 80% of the 200,000 injuries resulted from falls to the ground, whether it's from a swing, the top of a slide, losing grip on monkey bars, or simply tripping while running.

Having the suggested 12" of playground mulch in place can prevent these falls from leading to serious injuries, ultimately providing a safer environment for children to play and explore.

Common questions regarding playground mulch:

- **How much mulch should a playground have?** The current ASTM standard recommends a minimum depth of 12" of playground mulch.
- **What is the difference between playground mulch and regular (landscape) mulch?**

The main differences between playground mulch and landscape mulch lie in their composition, durability, and safety features.

- Composition and durability: Playground mulch, also known as Engineered Wood Fiber (EWF), is made from the "pulp" or inner part of the tree, unlike landscape mulch, which uses bark that degrades more quickly.
- Safety Features: EWF is specifically designed to be smoother, which reduces the risk of splinters, making it safer for children to play on. This type of mulch is also more durable and provides better shock absorption, helping to prevent injuries from falls.
- **How can I tell if I need more mulch?** If you have plastic playground borders, you can compare the depth of the mulch to the height of the borders (typically 8 or 12 inches high). Use a shovel to dig until you hit solid ground and measure the depth of mulch. Check for bare spots and pay attention to high-traffic areas for thinning as well.
- **What happens if someone falls and gets seriously injured and I don't have enough mulch?** In addition to the physical harm, there could be legal and financial consequences. If the playground is not maintained according to safety standards (including proper safety surfacing), the responsible party—such as the community manager, HOA, or school—could be held liable for negligence. This could result in costly lawsuits, insurance claims, and damage to the reputation of the organization.
- **How often should I top off the mulch at our playground?** The frequency of topping off the mulch at your playground depends on several factors, including the amount of use and weather conditions.
We recommend topping off the mulch at least once a year for HOAs, communities, apartments, and similar areas. For schools or locations with heavy play traffic, it's a good idea to replenish the mulch up to twice a year. Heavy rain or storms can wash away mulch, especially in areas with poor drainage. Check mulch depth after extreme weather events and replenish it if necessary.
- **How do I know how much mulch to order?** If you're unsure how much mulch you need but suspect you're low, reach out to your local [VPS Recreation representative](#). We can assist by providing measurements, the quantity required to achieve the recommended 12" of EWF, and a free quote for the mulch to be professionally installed. For a quote, please contact us at info@vaplaygrounds.com. We're here to help ensure your playground stays safe and well-maintained!