CITY OF NEW YORK / PARKS & RECREATION

INNOVATIONS

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NEW SYNTHETIC SPORTS FLOORS IN REC CENTERS

Many recreation centers are housed in old buildings that were originally designed for other purposes. Often these buildings contain rooms with concrete floors that are not suited for athletics or play. One cost-effective improvement that has been implemented in some recreation centers is the installation of synthetic sports surfaces on hard concrete floors.

The least expensive synthetic sports floors consist of portable plastic tiles that interlock with one another. The tiles are available in a wide array of colors and are appropriate for a variety of activities, including basketball, tennis, dance, and aerobics. In addition to brightening colorless spaces, plastic tiles provide cushioning to protect the knees and ankles of Parks patrons. Depending on the manufacturer, the tiles range in size from 10”x10” to 12”x12”. The tiles are waterproof and can be installed indoors or outdoors.

The Kips Bay Boys & Girls Club, a private recreation center in the Bronx, has a full-sized gymnasium with plastic sports tiles. The red and blue floor has basketball and volleyball lines painted on it. It is used for a variety of activities, including athletics, food service, and theater productions. A similar floor is installed on an outdoor basketball court near the Fountain of the Planets in Flushing Meadows-Corona Park. Plastic sports tile brands in the United States include **Sport Court** (800-421- 8112); **Multi-Play**, manufactured by Robbins (800-543-1913); and **Multi-Court**, manufactured by The Superior Floor Company (715-842-5358). The tiles range in cost from $4.00 to $6.00 a square foot — $18,800-$28,200 for a regulation-sized basketball court. The floor systems come with a ten-year limited warranty.

This spring, Parks will install a synthetic floor that has the look of wood in the gymnasium at St. James Recreation Center in the Bronx. The floor consists of a foam underlayer with a polyurethane protective layer on top. Unlike wood, the floor is waterproof and can be used as a meal-service area as well as a gymnasium. This type of synthetic floor, called **Taraflex** (800-653-2674), costs approximately $8.50 per square foot, or $39,950 for a regulation-sized basketball court.

In comparison to wood floors, synthetic sports floors are relatively easy to maintain. In general, they should be cleaned daily using a dust mop and periodically using water and the manufacturer’s recommended cleaning solution. *For additional information about synthetic sports floors, contact Emily Willits at (212) 360-8298.*

GRAFFITI REMOVAL FROM PLASTICS AND TREES

Parks’ R&D Team has identified two products that work well on recycled plastic benches and on trees: **Twocan Graffiti Stopp** (508-226-3726), which costs $15.15 per quart; and **Tagster Graffiti Emulsifier** (800- 688-6221), which costs $31.53 per quart. These products will remove most spray paints and markers from plastic benches and trees. Both products are nontoxic and biodegradable. *For additional information about graffiti removal from plastic benches and trees, contact Marc Dember at (212) 360-8278.*

RECYCLED PLASTIC BENCHES ECO-FRIENDLY

During the last decade, Parks' Design division has introduced a number of recycled items into New York City's parks. Materials such as recycled concrete and recycled safety surface tiles are used in park reconstructions to make parks more friendly to the environment. One of the most visible recycled materials in parks is recycled plastic lumber, which is used to make bench slats and curbs.

Recycled plastic lumber is made from at least 80% post-consumer recycled polyethylene, the same plastic used in milk jugs. The plastic is melted down and extruded into park bench slats or curbing for soil and woodchips. Recycled plastic lumber is available in a number of colors and can be textured to look like wood.

Parks began to use recycled plastic lumber extensively in 1997 when the American Society for Testing and Materials introduced national testing guidelines for recycled plastic. These guidelines allowed Parks to establish quality control standards for plastic lumber.

More recently, Parks' Specifications division has worked with bench manufacturers to incorporate steel reinforcement beams into plastic bench slats to prevent warping. Currently each of the four models of benches that Parks purchases is available in recycled plastic. Two of the models are available exclusively in plastic. *For additional information about plastic bench slats, contact Specifications at (718) 760-6700.*

PITBULL-RESISTANT SWINGS

One of the more bizarre forms of vandalism in New York City parks takes place when pitbull owners train their dogs to attack using rubber swings as bait. The chewed-up swings that the dogs leave behind are unattractive and impossible to repair. In an effort to solve this problem three years ago, OMP and Parks Specifications solicited designs for "pitbull-resistant" swings from play equipment manufacturers. Jensen Swing Products, Inc., produced a design for a polyurethane swing that dogs can not chew through. When dogs do bite the polyurethane swings, the rough marks left by teeth can be sanded down using a metal file. Parks began purchasing and installing the pitbull-resistant swings in 1998.

Although pitbull-resistant swings are much more durable than rubber swings, the design continues to evolve. When Parks first began to install dog-resistant swings, the space between the swing and the bottom of the yoke created a potential head entrapment hazard. In addition, the swing yokes were damaged when park patrons wound them over the swing set frame. Jensen modified the design to eliminate these problems. This modification, however, created a new problem: the stainless steel yokes still have weak points where they are threaded to the swing. When park patrons misuse the swings by twisting them, the metal yokes can break.

In conjunction with Jensen Swing Products, Park Specifications has developed a new swing yoke that is stronger and safer than the previous models. The new yoke consists of a stainless steel rod welded around eyebolts that allow the rods to move more freely. The yoke's V-shape ensures that it will not create an entrapment hazard. Parks Specifications and Jensen Swing Products are in the final stages of pricing the yokes. They will be available for purchase 6-8 weeks after the price is determined. *For more information about pitbull-resistant swings or swing yokes, contact Susan Coker at (718) 760-6703.*

PIP DATA AVAILABLE IN BOROUGH OFFICES

This winter, OMP installed copies of the Park Inspection Program database on computers in each borough office. Borough analysts can now access electronic versions of PIP inspections and ratings reports on their own, rather than requesting reports from OMP.

The borough offices are equipped to run 50 types of reports based on the PIP database. The database can produce ratings information for a district, a borough, or the entire city. Ratings information can also be generated for specific combinations of features.

Managers or Supervisors seeking ratings information for their borough or districts should contact their Borough Analyst. The analysts are Adrian Sas in the Bronx (718-430-4653); Ed Franklin in Queens (718-520- 5910); Debbie DeGregorio in Brooklyn (718-965-8957); John Miller in Manhattan (212-408-0235); and Judy Poole in Staten Island (718-390-8017).

NEW DESIGN STANDARDS PROTECT GREEN SPACES

In 1994 Commissioner Stern announced that every capital improvement in New York City parks should include a horticultural area or a community garden. Recently, Parks' Design team has taken several steps to protect this legacy of green spaces. These steps include:

• All new planting beds in playgrounds will be surrounded by fencing to guard against trampling. The fences will be at least 2'6" tall.
• Irrigation quick couplers will be conveniently installed near all new planting beds and in each new community garden.
• New curbing around planted beds will rise 2" above the beds to help retain wood chip mulch.
• All trees planted in playground areas will be at least 3 ½" – 4" in diameter to increase their durability.
• Where possible, tree groves will be located away from active play areas to ensure survivability.
• All trees located within a playground area will be branched high at the time of planting to avoid the creation of hazardous conditions. Trees with horizontal branching will be restricted to secure planting beds, located away from pedestrian and child access.
• All community gardens will be planted with a generous number of shrubs, producing the effect of a mature garden. The shrubs will be spaced closely together to ensure long-term survival.
• Each borough will be consulted about the size of the garden and the degree of community involvement during the design process.
• In general, there will be no areas of bare earth in new horticultural beds; all areas will be covered by shredded wood chip mulch or established lawns.

Any projects currently underway, as well as all future projects, must conform to these standards. *For additional information concerning design standards, please contact the Design Office at the Olmsted Center at (718) 760-6601.*

OPERATIONS CALENDAR

Each month OMP creates and prints an Operations Calendar for Parks field offices. The calendar lists monthly agency goals, objectives, and reminders for field personnel. *If you have submissions for the calendar or if you would like one for your office, call Emily Willits at (212) 360-8298.*

SEND US YOUR INNOVATIONS!

Do you have ideas that you know would improve the performance of our agency? If you have suggestions for this newsletter or have recently implemented an innovative idea, please contact Geoff "Bass Clef" Hash at (212) 360-8289.

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--Prepared by Emily Willits and Geoff Hash, 3/10/00--