

Sand pit maintenance

January 2011

Introduction

Sand is one of the most popular play space materials and greatly enhances the quality of play opportunities and children's play experiences.

We have sand pits in the eleven parks: Dalmeny Park, Elthorne Park, Foxham Gardens, Whittington Park, Wray Crescent, Graham Street Park, King Square, Myddelton Square, Rosemary Gardens, Highbury Fields and St Paul's Shrubbery.

As part of our grounds maintenance contract, each day park keepers record anything found in sand pits.

Current guidance

The Natural Play Maintenance Guide argues that an assessment of how to maintain sand pits should be site specific. PLAYLINK has found that maintenance varies across the country from daily to monthly visual inspections, raked daily to raked rarely, and topped up several times a year to every other year.

RoSPA Information Sheet 26 'Sand Play in Children's Play Areas' argues that the problems associated with maintaining sand pits are "much less than folk-lore suggests". It recommends that regular raking will be needed (ideally daily but never less than weekly), with periodic forking, regular use of disinfectant, annual topping up and occasional replacement.

What we did and how much it cost

Sand was inspected and cleared daily, forked and disinfected weekly, topped up as necessary and replaced roughly every three years. The total annual cost of maintaining sand pits in 2010/11 was £35,000.

Evidence for change

We reviewed park keepers' records and found that over 5 months from July to November 2010 nothing was found in sand pits at most sites. At Highbury Fields and Wray Crescent substances were found that might require subsequent disinfectant around 2 to 3 times a month.

What we do now

Based on the latest guidance and the latest site specific findings, a new maintenance regime is in place:

- Inspect and clear all sites daily, fork all sites weekly
- Disinfect Highbury Fields & Wray Crescent sand pits every other week
- Disinfect all other sand pits once a month
- Top up and replace sand as necessary
- Monitor what is found at each site over the next year and reassess after 12 months

The results

Making a small change to our maintenance regime has seen the total cost of maintaining sand pits go down by around £20,000 per year.

This has helped us to reach current savings targets and helps to dispel the myth that sand is problematic and expensive to maintain.