

PlaySafe and Live Well!

Welcome to *PlaySafe*, LLC's informational column. Every month we will work hard to provide you with up-to-date information on topics related to parks, recreation, health, wellness, and physical education. Our hope is that by providing you with detailed information, you will go forward and positively change the world. If you have questions or comments, or if you would like to share your thoughts, please contact us through this web site. Thanks. Now PlaySafe and live well!

An interview with a playground installer and maintenance company.

By Butch DeFillippo

It is always nice to get a fresh and different view of the world in which we live; this month I (*PlaySafe*, LLC) thought it would be interesting to interview a company that provides installation and maintenance services for playground equipment and surfacing. I chose Hansen and Prezzano Builders (H&P). They have installed over 7000 playgrounds (from Florida to California) and conduct daily maintenance to a large school district's 26 playgrounds. H&P have 5 CPSIs on staff, have been in business since 1985, and are certified installers for 5 playground manufacturers.

PlaySafe, LLC: What do you think are the challenges of installing playgrounds?

H&P: Some of the manufactures are not as precise in the installation directions as others. There are a lot of variables in the field and the vague directions only complicate things. We sometimes have to contact them to get clarification which slows down the installation.

Weather – everyone wants the playground installed ASAP but it's difficult to install a playground during a monsoon or blizzard.

Grade issues - The slope restrictions for maintaining accessibility, the max and min heights of varying components across a site, and convincing owners and designers that 2% is still too steep for many manufacturer's designs are ongoing issues.

Drainage issues - In far too many cases playgrounds are placed where they create drainage problems. Either too close to an area that needs to shed water or too close to the lowest part of sites where water collects. This becomes an ongoing issue if not addressed in the design.

Having knowledgeable playground professionals on the team - Many other professionals do not find playground professionals to confirm their designs meet the standards of varying disciplines. For some reason playgrounds are often left out or, worse yet, left in the hands of those whose profits are affected by the design. Our kids deserve far better.

PlaySafe,LLC: What changes would you like to see from the manufacturers of playgrounds?

H&P: Better communication. Sending us to speak with a sales representative with no engineering or design background does not help – it only slows us down. Treat us as part of the team – we are working with your designs daily – take some of our advice/perspective to heart.

PlaySafe,LLC: What are the challenges of maintaining playgrounds?

H&P: One of the toughest parts of maintaining playgrounds is convincing the owner that money does need to be spent on parts from the manufacturer when problems are encountered. You cannot just buy the parts at the local hardware store.

Also, you don't just put a playground out there and never have to do any maintenance. The equipment and surfacing of a playground is very dynamic and requires regular routine maintenance.

PlaySafe,LLC: What do you see happening regarding the supervision of children on playgrounds?

H&P: Supervisors of children on playgrounds usually make the assumption that playgrounds have no risks to a child's safety. This is simply not true. Inappropriate use is a frequent cause of injuries on playgrounds and supervisors need to understand how to use a playground correctly.

Playground supervisors must be near and interacting with the children – we sometimes see them sitting in the shade or texting on a phone.

PlaySafe,LLC: What do you see as the greatest joy from working with playgrounds?

H&P: The kids! What a great job to have improving the lives and health of children every day. How many people do you know that don't have that kind of fulfillment in their jobs.

Another favorite part of making a living in the installation end of the playground industry is the contact with so many others who share my enjoyment of investing in others; especially children.

The toys – we get to build things everyday with the tools/equipment/vehicles that you dream about using as a kid.

PlaySafe,LLC: What areas of the playground require the most attention?

H&P: Design, drainage, supervision, ownership, surfacing, and maintenance are all areas that need additional, ongoing attention.

I would like to thank Hep Prezzano, Brian Hansen, Keith Kline, and Joseph Loretto for taking the time and effort to answer my many questions and help us all to better understand the playground installer and maintainers' point of view.

In 1997, a group of Parks and Recreation, Physical Education and private recreation professionals formed *PlaySafe*, LLC to provide resources that were not readily available to the public and private sectors. Today, PlaySafe, LLC is the largest, most respected and highly skilled playground, surfacing and ball field safety auditing firm in the United States. Our staff members are experts in playground safety, athletic field testing, bleacher inspections, master plans, feasibility studies and program development. Our training and seminars are informative and will make your organization the best it can be. *PlaySafe*, LLC staff includes Parks and Recreation, Physical Education and Community Health professionals with over 200 years of combined experience.

PlaySafe, LLC is the Premiere Recreational Consulting Company. *PlaySafe*, LLC assists municipalities, schools, childcare providers, communities and other recreation-providing entities by offering the following services throughout the United States: Playground Equipment and Surfacing Audits, Recreational Topic Seminars and Training, Recreation and Physical Education Plans, GMax Turf Testing, Bleacher Inspections, and Expert Witness Services.