

## Chapter 3: OUTDOOR LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

### Purpose Of These Requirements

It is becoming clearer from emerging research that children need to spend time outdoors to be healthy as they grow and develop. “Children will be smarter, better able to get along with others, healthier and happier when they have regular opportunities for free and unstructured play in the out-of-doors.” (Burdette and Whitaker, 2005) The purpose of these requirements is to ensure that all children in child care are given the opportunity to play outdoors on a daily basis and ensure the outdoor learning environment is safe. Outdoor play is beneficial to children as well as caregivers. Research tells us that spending time outdoors, exposed to fresh air, sunlight, and natural elements such as trees and grass, provides many health benefits.

The outdoor learning environment offers a sense of freedom for children. Children are able to play freely with peers, expand their imagination beyond the restraints of indoor activities, release energy, and explore their sense of touch, smell, taste and their sense of motion. Caregivers are in a unique position to utilize the outdoor environment to promote development and learning. The Division requires that children in licensed child care programs spend time outdoors every day, weather permitting.

The North Carolina Outdoor Learning Environments (NC OLE) Alliance is a statewide collaboration comprised of organizations, agencies, and individuals focused on improving the quality of outdoor environments and experiences for all children. To access research and other supporting information on the benefits of outdoor play visit the Outdoor Section of the NC Office of School Readiness web site at [www.osr.nc.gov/ole](http://www.osr.nc.gov/ole).



Another resource available is the *Preschool Outdoor Environment Measurement Scale (POEMS)*, which is a measurement tool available to assist in evaluating the quality of the outdoor environment in child care centers for children three to five years of age. To learn more about quality in outdoor environments for child care and POEMS visit [www.poemsn.org](http://www.poemsn.org).


### **Definition**

- **Weather permitting** is defined as every day, unless there is active precipitation, extremely hot or cold conditions, or public service announcements that advise people to stay indoors due to weather conditions that could be hazardous. The Division allows child care operators to use their best judgment when deciding to take children outdoors in order to make sure children remain safe.

## SECTION I. DAILY OUTDOOR PLAY

### **NORTH CAROLINA GENERAL STATUTE 110-91(2) AND CHILD CARE RULE .0509 Daily Outdoor Play**

-  Each child in care must be given the opportunity for outdoor play each day that weather conditions permit.
-  The center must provide space and time for vigorous indoor activities when weather conditions do not permit children to play outdoors.

- All children, including infants and toddlers, must be taken outdoors daily.
- Licensed after school programs are required to take children outside daily even if the program operates less than 4 hours a day.
- The amount of time children must spend outdoors or the high and low temperatures for outdoor play are not specified in the child care rules. Child care operators are allowed to use their best judgment when deciding to take children outdoors.
- Short periods of time outdoors must be provided even in hot or cold weather. Playing in gentle rain or snow is a learning experience and can be both educational and fun for children. Make sure children are dressed appropriately.
- The schedule may need to be changed to allow children to go outdoors at the most appropriate time of the day.
- Children that are too sick to go outdoors and/or are not able to participate in all daily activities, which include outdoor activities, should be excluded from care until they are well enough to participate in all daily activities.
-  Getting outdoors daily, even in the winter, helps children develop healthy minds and bodies. Many adults believe children will get sick from playing outside in cold weather. Children are actually more likely to stay healthier if they play outdoors during winter months. Germs are not contained and concentrated outdoors. Refer to the Winter 2005 issue of the NC Child Care Health and Safety Bulletin on Outdoor Health and Safety for additional information about how the outdoors is healthy for children. [www.healthychildcarenc.org](http://www.healthychildcarenc.org)

**HH** - When outdoor play is not possible, unspent energy can make children irritable, anxious, and difficult to manage. Make indoor days more pleasant and fun by planning activities that keep children active.

**HH** - Help parents understand the benefits of outside play and that children are learning when they go outside. Let parents know children will be going outdoors daily, weather permitting, and to make sure to dress their child properly for the weather.

**HH** - The United States Department of Health and Human Services and the National Association for Sports and Physical Education recommends children should engage in at least 60 minutes of physical activity daily.



The National Health and Safety Performance Standards developed by The Iowa Department of Public Health created the Child Care Weather Watch as a guide to assist caregivers in planning for playtime, field trips, and weather safety. A copy of this guide is available at [www.idph.state.ia.us/hcci/common/pdf/weatherwatch.pdf](http://www.idph.state.ia.us/hcci/common/pdf/weatherwatch.pdf). The Child Care Weather Watch is also used by the North Carolina Rated License Assessment Project to determine “weather permitting.”

## SECTION 2: OUTDOOR SPACE REQUIREMENTS

### NORTH CAROLINA GENERAL STATUTE 110-91(6) AND CHILD CARE RULE .1402 Space Requirements



There must be 75 square feet of outdoor space per child, or for the number of children indicated by the center’s licensed capacity.

- If licensed for 6 to 29 children inclusive, there must be 75 square feet per child of outdoor play area for the total number of children for which the center is licensed.
- If licensed for more than 30 children, there must be at least 75 square feet per child of outdoor play area for at least one-half of the total number for which the center is licensed, provided that the minimum amount of space is enough to accommodate at least 30 children.
- The total number of children on the playground cannot exceed the number of children the space will accommodate at 75 square feet per child.

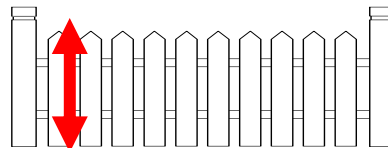
- ☑ Centers operating exclusively during the evening and early morning hours (6:00 pm through 6:00 am) do not have to meet the outdoor play area requirements.
- ☑ In some areas, there are local zoning ordinances that require larger space requirements per child than the minimum state requirement. It is the operator’s responsibility to make sure that all local/city/county ordinances are met.
- ★ To be eligible for more points in program standards for the issuance of a Star Rated License, you will need to meet additional outdoor space requirements. Refer to Chapter 17– Star Rated License for specific requirements.


**NORTH CAROLINA GENERAL STATUTE 110-91(6) AND  
CHILD CARE RULE .0605  
Requirements for a Fence**

- ★ The outdoor play area must be protected by a fence of at least 4 feet in height.
- ★ The fence must not contain entrapments and fences lower than 6 feet tall must be free of protrusions.
- ★ The fencing must exclude fixed bodies of water such as ditches, quarries, canals, excavations, and fishponds.
- ★ Gates to the fenced outdoor play area must remain securely closed while children occupy the area.

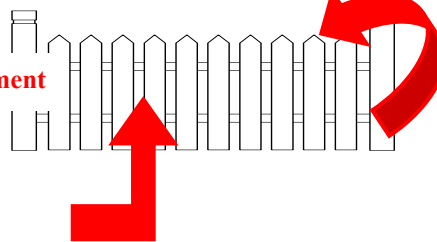
- ☑ Entrapment is considered any opening greater than 3 ½ inches but less than 9 inches that would allow a child’s body to pass through but could trap a child’s head.
- ☑ Protrusion is any object that extends past the outer surface of a piece of equipment that could puncture or scrape children or entangle clothing.
- ☑ The purpose of the fence surrounding an outdoor learning environment is to keep children safe inside and provide protection from roaming animals or other people outside the play area.
- ☑ The height of a fence will be measured from the interior side and will begin at the top of any surfacing located directly next to the fence and extend to the top of the fence.

**Fence height**





- Check all openings in the fence for possible entrapments or protrusions.
-  Centers operating in a public school are deemed to have adequate fencing protection and, therefore, are not required to have a fence regardless of who operates the program.

**Possible Entrapment**






**Possible Protrusion**



-  If a fence that completely encloses the designated outdoor area is present, it must meet the standards in Section .0600 of the child care requirements. There also must be sufficient square footage available within the fenced area to accommodate the number of children the program is licensed for, or an additional open area must be designated for outdoor play.
-  All equipment located within the fenced area designated for use by the licensed public school program serving preschool age children must meet the requirements in Section .0600.

### SECTION 3: EQUIPMENT REQUIREMENTS

**CHILD CARE RULE .0605**  
**Condition of Outdoor Learning Environment**

-  Each child care center must provide an outdoor play environment that is safe and free of hazards.
-  If equipment is provided, proper maintenance of all equipment is required and all equipment must be in good repair.
-  If provided, commercially manufactured equipment must be assembled and installed according to procedures specified by the manufacturer.

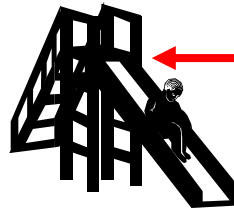
- Manufactured equipment is not required and while it may offer unique opportunities and challenges for children, it should not dominate the outdoor learning environment.

- ☑ Equipment accessible to children during normal supervised play must be sturdy, stable, and free of hazards, which include sharp edges, lead based paint, loose nails, splinters, protrusions (excluding nuts and bolts on sides of fences), and pinch and crush points.
  - ☑ All broken equipment must be removed from the premises immediately or made inaccessible to children.
  - ☑ Make sure all nails and bolts are flush with the outer surface of equipment.
  - ☑ Children are not allowed to play on outdoor equipment that is too hot to touch.
  - ☑ If a center chooses to use lightweight, portable equipment, they must make sure that it is used properly and safely. Many companies indicate that this type of equipment is intended for home use only and will not hold up to high use at a child care center. An alert was issued by the U.S. Consumer Products Safety Commission (CPSC) that indicated these pieces of equipment should never be placed over concrete, asphalt, wood, or other hard surfaces.
- HH** – It is best practice to conduct morning safety walks to observe the outdoor area before children go outside. There may be fallen tree limbs, trash, wasp nests, ice or other hazards that sometimes turn up over night or over the weekend.
-  The law exempts playground equipment on public school grounds used by school-age children from having to meet the child care rules related to the outdoor area, including the playground safety training and completing the monthly playground inspection. The exemption does not exempt public schools from having to remove or fix broken equipment if it is to be used by children. The law also specifies that the exemption will be noted on the license.
-  CPSC is committed to protecting consumers and families from products that pose a fire, electrical, chemical, or mechanical hazard or can injure children. To obtain product safety information or to report unsafe products call 800-638-2772 or visit their website at [www.cpsc.gov](http://www.cpsc.gov).

**CHILD CARE RULE .0605**  
**Condition of Outdoor Learning Environment**

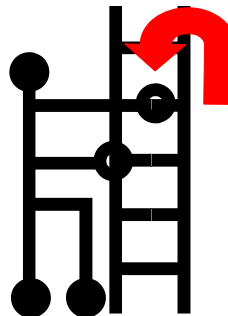
- ★ Upright angles on equipment or fencing must be greater than 55 degrees to prevent entrapment and entanglement.
- ★ Any openings in equipment, steps, decks, fences, and handrails must be smaller than 3 ½ inches or greater than 9 inches.

- ☑ An upright angle would be any “V” shaped corner formed by adjacent components of play equipment.



The space where the handrails meet the slide could be an upright angle.

- ☑ Possible entrapment in a ladder: space between slats should be less than 3 ½ inches or greater than 9 inches.



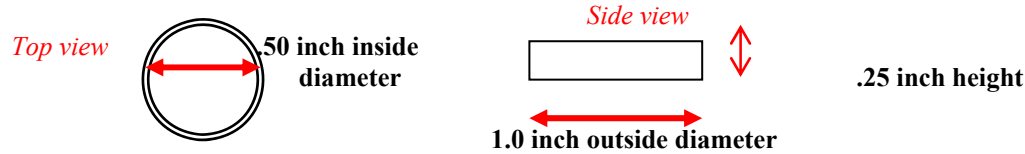
- ☑ Entrapments are a very serious safety hazard and children have died or been seriously injured due to entrapments on playground equipment.
- ☑ Check all openings in steps, decks, handrails, fences and other areas on equipment for entrapments.

**CHILD CARE RULE .0605**  
**Condition of Outdoor Play Equipment**

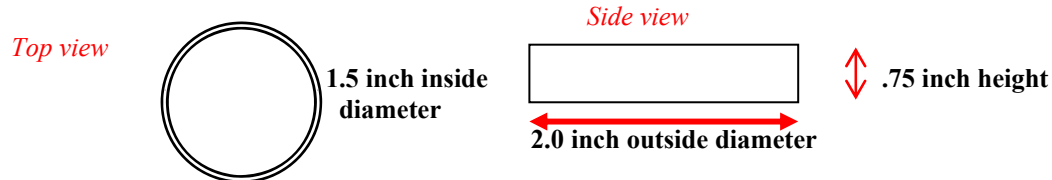
- ★ All equipment must be free of protrusions.

- ☑ Protrusions can be tested using three different gauges. The gauges are hollow tubes, usually plastic or PVC pipe, in the dimensions indicated below:

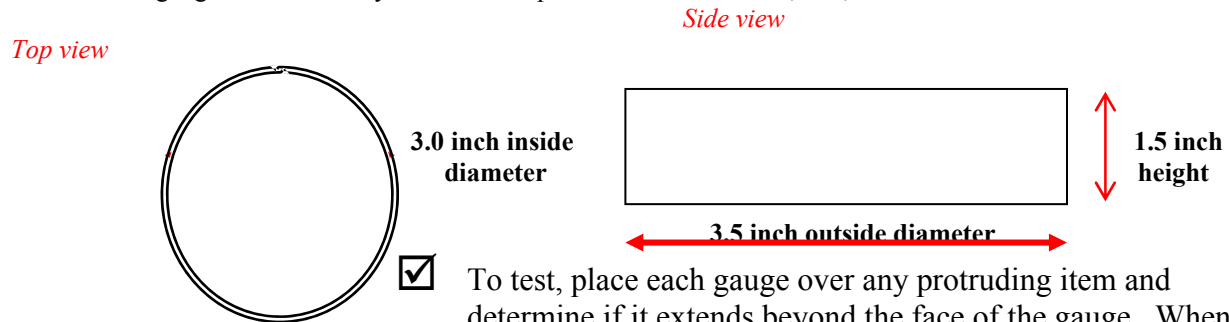
1. The first gauge tests the ability of an item to puncture a child's temple/head.



2. The second gauge tests the ability of an item to puncture a child's eye socket.



3. The third gauge tests the ability of an item to puncture a child's chest, ribs, and/or stomach.



- ☑ To test, place each gauge over any protruding item and determine if it extends beyond the face of the gauge. When tested, no portion of the item should extend outside any of the three gauges.
- ☑ You can build your own gauges using the above measurements and appropriate materials.
- ☑ Places to look for protrusions include bolts on equipment or fences, handrails on spring rockers, or other fixed equipment.

### **CHILD CARE RULE .0605**

#### **Fall Zones and Resilient Surfacing**

- ★ If equipment is provided, all stationary outdoor equipment more than 18 inches high must be installed over protective surfacing.
- ★ Footings, which anchor equipment, should not be exposed.
- ★ Loose surfacing material shall not be installed over concrete.



- ☑ Stationary equipment is any equipment that is anchored to the ground or is so heavy that it cannot be easily moved.
- ☑ Centers wishing to offer the safest outdoor learning environments may consider installing or having resilient surfacing under and around all pieces of equipment whether anchored or not.
- ☑ Acceptable materials to be used for surfacing include: wood mulch, double shredded bark mulch, uniform wood chips, fine sand, coarse sand, and pea gravel.
- ☑ Other materials that have been certified by the manufacturer to be shock-absorbing protective material in accordance with the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) Standard 1292 may be used only if installed, maintained, and replaced according to the manufacturer’s instructions. This could include rubberized tiles, shredded tires or poured-in-place rubber surfacing. You will need to have written proof of testing done on the materials to certify that it meets the ASTM standard.
- ☑ We recommend receiving prior approval from your child care consultant before installing alternative types of surfacing material to make sure it complies with the surfacing requirements.
- ☑ The amount (depth) of surfacing needed is based on the critical height of the equipment. The critical height is defined as the maximum height a child may climb, sit or stand. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission defines critical height as the maximum fall height from which a life threatening head injury would not be expected to occur. The critical height value of the surfacing material under and around playground equipment should be no less than the height of the equipment.

Type of Surfacing	Equipment Critical Height		
	5 ft or less	6 ft	7 ft – 10 ft
Fine or coarse sand	6 inches	12 inches	12 inches
Wood mulch	6 inches	6 inches	9 inches
Double shredded bark mulch	6 inches	6 inches	9 inches
Wood chips	6 inches	6 inches	9 inches
Pea gravel	6 inches	6 inches	9 inches

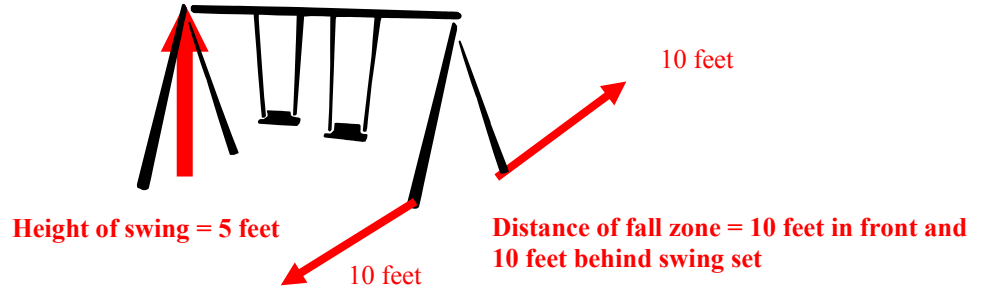
- ☑ Pea gravel cannot be used as a surfacing material in areas used by children less than 3 years of age.
- ☑ Sand is not recommended as a surfacing material in areas used by children less than 2 years of age. Young children may ingest sand and uncovered areas of sand cannot be protected from contamination.
- ☑ Checking the depth and resiliency of surfacing material should be done regularly. Maintenance will be required to replace any missing surfacing or to rake and aerate the existing material.
- ☑ Carefully check the depth of surfacing in high use areas such as exit regions of slides, areas under swing sets, and high traffic areas.
- ★ To be eligible for the most points in program standards for the issuance for a Star Rated License, you will need to have an Environment Rating Scale assessment completed. Refer to Chapter 17 – Star Rated License for specific details concerning fall zones and surfacing and the Environment Rating Scale.

**CHILD CARE RULE .0605**  
**Special Requirements for Fall Zones**

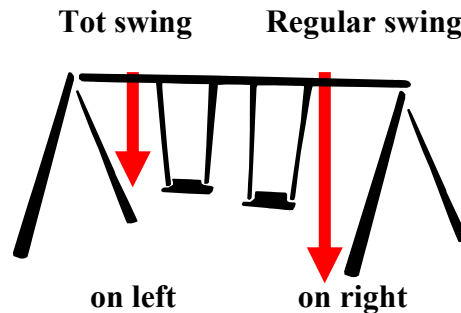
- ★ For stationary outdoor equipment used by children under two years of age, the protective surfacing must extend beyond the external limits of the equipment for a minimum of 3 feet, except for structures that have a protective barrier. On these structures, protective surfacing is only required at all points of entrance and exit.
- ★ For stationary outdoor equipment used by children two years of age or older, the protective surfacing must extend beyond the external limits of the equipment for a minimum of 6 feet.
- ★ No other equipment can be located within the fall zone of a piece of stationary equipment.
- ★ Fall zones can overlap around spring rockers and around equipment that is more than 18 inches but less than 30 inches in height.
- ★ If there are two adjacent structures and one is more than 18 inches but less than 30 inches in height, the protective surfacing must extend a minimum of 9 feet between the two structures.

- ☑ The area required to have protective surfacing is the area under and around the equipment where the child is likely to fall and is called the fall zone.

- ☑ Swings must have protective surfacing that extends twice the length of the pivot point to the surface below. The surfacing should be to the front and rear of the swing.

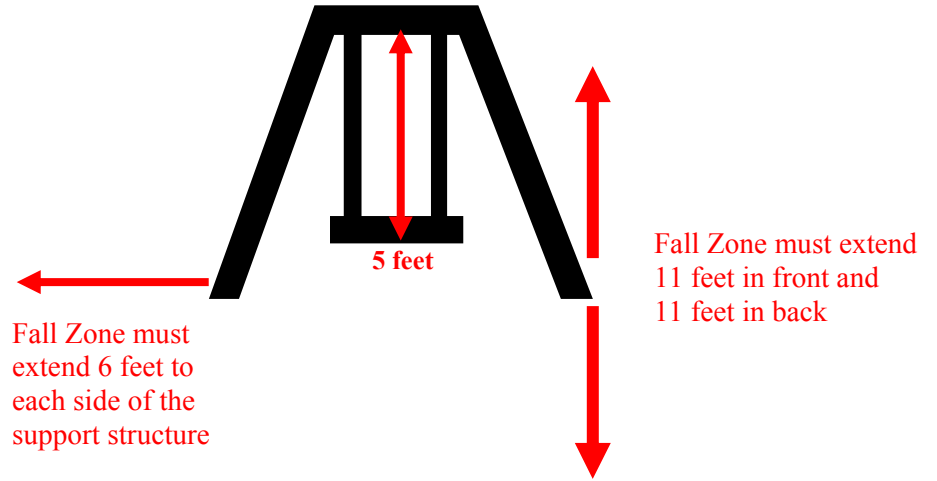


- ☑ Swings do not need surfacing material or fall zones to the side of the swing set.
- ☑ Swings should not be attached to a composite structure. A composite structure is defined as two or more play components attached or directly adjacent to each other creating one integral unit that provides more than one play unit (for example, combination climber, slide, and horizontal ladder).
- ☑ The height of swings is measured from the top of the surfacing material underneath the swing set to the pivot point. The pivot point is the point at which the swing chains meet the support structure.
- ☑ Tot swings must have protective surfacing that extends twice the length of the pivot point to the bottom of the swing seat. The surfacing must extent from the front to the rear of the swing. A tot swing is defined as a swing with an enclosed seat.



- ☑ Swing seats must be made of plastic or soft or flexible material.

- ☑ Tire swings must have protective surfacing that extends a distance of six feet plus the measurement from the pivot point to the swing seat and six feet to the side of the support structure.



- ☑ Homemade equipment can be used if it is safe and functional.
- ☑ Materials and equipment that are accessible to children must not be coated or treated with or contain toxic materials such as creosote, pentachlorophenol, tributyl tin oxide, dislodgeable arsenic and any finishes that contain pesticides. Always check with the manufacturer or supplier to receive safety data before purchasing materials or equipment.
- 📁 The Rules Governing the Sanitation of Child Care Centers has specific requirements regarding the construction and installation of materials and equipment made from chromated copper arsenate (CCA) pressure-treated wood. These requirements are located in Appendix C – Sanitation of Child Care Centers - Rule 15A NCAC 18A .2831(e-g).

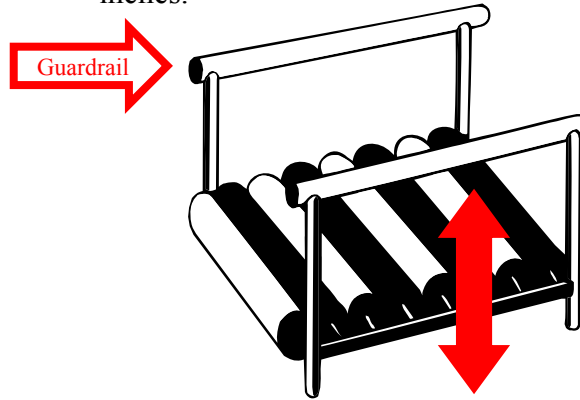
**CHILD CARE RULE .0605**  
**Guardrails and Protective Barriers**

- ★ Elevated platforms must have a guardrail or protective barrier, depending on the height of the platform and the age of children that will have access to the piece of equipment.
- ★ Guardrails are required for equipment used by preschool and school age children if a platform is more than 20 inches but less than 30 inches.
- ★ Guardrails are required for equipment used by school age children only, if a platform is more than 30 inches but less than 48 inches.

- ☑ Guardrails prevent inadvertent or unintentional falls off a raised platform.
- ☑ The critical height of a piece of equipment with a guardrail is measured from the ground to the top of the guardrail.
- ☑ Protective barriers prevent children from climbing over or through the barrier.
- ☑ A barrier is a solid railing that will prevent children from climbing over or through a piece of equipment.
- ☑ The critical height of a piece of equipment with a protective barrier is measured from the ground to the platform.

- ☑ Equipment used exclusively by children under 2 years of age:
  - Protective barriers – an elevated surface that is more than 18 inches above surfacing must have a protective barrier. The minimum height of the top surface of the protective barrier must be 24 inches.
  - Maximum height – the platform or elevated play surface can be no greater than 32 inches.
- ☑ Equipment used exclusively by children 2 years of age and up to school age:
  - Guardrails – an elevated surface that is more than 20 inches and no more than 30 inches above the underlying surface must have a guardrail. The minimum height of the top surface of the guardrail must be 29 inches and the lower edges must be no more than 23 inches above the platform.
  - Protective barriers – an elevated surface that is more than 30 inches above the underlying surface must have a protective barrier. The minimum height of the top surface of the protective barrier must be 29 inches.
- ☑ Equipment used by children 2 years of age and older:
  - Guardrails – an elevated surface more than 20 inches and no more than 30 inches above the underlying surface must have a guardrail. The minimum height of the top surface of the guardrail must be 38 inches and the lower edge must be no more than 23 inches above the platform.
  - Protective barriers – an elevated surface that is more than 30 inches above the underlying surface must have a protective barrier. The minimum height of the top surface of the protective barrier must be 38 inches.
- ☑ Equipment used exclusively by school-age children:
  - Guardrails – an elevated surface more than 30 inches and no more than 48 inches above the underlying surface must have a guardrail. The minimum height of the top surface of the guardrail must be 38 inches and the lower edge must not be more than 26 inches above the platform.

- Protective barriers – an elevated surface that is more than 48 inches above the underlying surface must have a protective barrier. The minimum height of the top of the top surface of the protective barrier must be 38 inches.

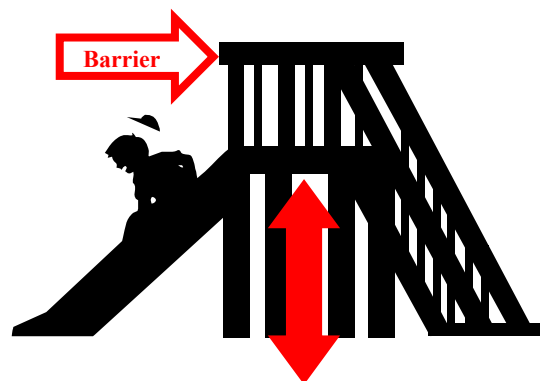


Critical Height = Ground to top of Guardrail

### **CHILD CARE RULE .0605** **Protective Barriers on Outdoor Play Equipment**

- ★ Protective barriers are required for equipment used by preschool and school age children if a platform is more than 30 inches.
- ★ Protective barriers are required for equipment used by school age children only if a platform is more than 48 inches.
- ★ The height of a protective barrier is based on the ages of children using the equipment.



- ☑ Be cautious that you do not create entrapments between your rails or between the platform and the barrier




Critical Height = Ground to Platform





## SECTION 4: SAFETY REQUIREMENTS

### **GENERAL STATUTE 110-91(6) & CHILD CARE RULE .0601 Safe Environment**

-  A safe outdoor learning environment must be provided for all children in care.
-  Outdoor play equipment and materials must be age and developmentally appropriate.


- All equipment and furnishings must be child size or can be adapted for safe and effective use by children using the equipment.
- Equipment and materials must be age and developmentally appropriate for all children who will use it.
-  Web addresses for additional **Playground Safety Resources** are located in the resource section.


### **GENERAL STATUTE 110-91(12) & CHILD CARE RULE .0508, .0509, & .0601 Requirements for Activities**

-  The daily schedule must show block of time for activities that are scheduled for outdoor areas.
-  Developmentally appropriate materials and equipment must be accessible for all children on a daily basis.
-  Materials and equipment for outdoor play must be sufficient to provide a variety of play experiences that can promote children's development socially, emotionally, intellectually, and physically.
-  Developmentally appropriate equipment and materials must be provided for a variety of outdoor activities which allow for vigorous play and large muscle development.

- Outdoor learning environments help children develop physically, socially, emotionally, and intellectually
- When setting up your outdoor environment include natural elements such as plants, trees, grass, gardens, and hills to provide opportunities for children to experience and interact with natural materials and learn about nature.
- Keep in mind children are developmentally different in size and ability when selecting appropriate materials and equipment.




- ☑ Outdoor learning environments for infants should offer space where children can move around and explore. Appropriate play areas for this age group should provide space for children to stand, sit, crawl, and walk.
  - ☑ Outdoor learning environments for children aged 2-5 years old should offer areas with smaller steps and crawl spaces. Appropriate play areas for this age group might include areas to crawl; low platforms with multiple access such as ramps and ladders; low tables for sand, water and manipulation of these materials; tricycle paths; sand areas with covers; and shorter slides.
  - ☑ Outdoor learning environments for school-age children might include: rope or chain climbers on angles, climbing pieces, horizontal bars, open spaces to run and play ball.
  - ☑ The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) describes unstructured physical play as a developmentally appropriate outlet for reducing stress in children.
  - ☑ Outdoor learning environments should provide accessibility and play opportunities for all children. If equipment is provided, consider equipment and design to give children with special needs the ability to play on equipment and interact in activities with other children.
  - ☑ Outdoor learning materials must allow for different types of experiences including vigorous play and large muscle development.
- HH** – The National Program for Playground Safety (NPPS) offers the following recommendations:
- Loose ropes should not be used on playground equipment. Loose ropes have caused strangulation and severe injuries.
  - Clothing strings, loose clothing, and stringed items placed around the neck can catch on playground equipment and strangle children.
  - Children should not wear bike helmets when on playground equipment.
-  Refer to the resource section for three documents on outdoor learning environments provided by the NC OLE:
- “Getting Started: Ten Free or Inexpensive Ideas to Enrich Your Outdoor Learning Environment Today”
  - “What the Research Shows: A Summary”
  - “What’s In It For Me? What Teachers/Caregivers can expect to gain from “taking on” the Outdoors...”

 See the chart below for material and equipment suggestions. Remember almost anything that can be experienced indoors can be experienced outdoors.

<b>For Infants (Birth - 18 months)</b>	<b>For Toddlers (18 – 36 months)</b>		<b>For Preschoolers (3 – 5 years old)</b>	<b>For Schoolagers</b>
Blankets Buckets Tunnel Balls Boxes Pillows Texture cans Prop board Foam mat Blocks	Push & pull toys Wheeled toys Balance board Broom Sand box Water tub Steps Shovel Bean bag chair Rubber inner-tube swings	Climber Blocks Tunnel Balls Boxes Buckets Rake Hoe Rocking boat Benches	Tricycles Multi-use balls Bubble blowing materials Swings Low slides Boxes Broomstick horses Balancing boards Bean bags Marching music Tumbling pads	Large open space to play Balancing boards Climbing equipment Space to hop, skip, scoot, roll, etc. Places to jump off (low steps or low decks) Jump ropes Tumbling mats Buckets Props to manipulate sand/water/dirt Balls

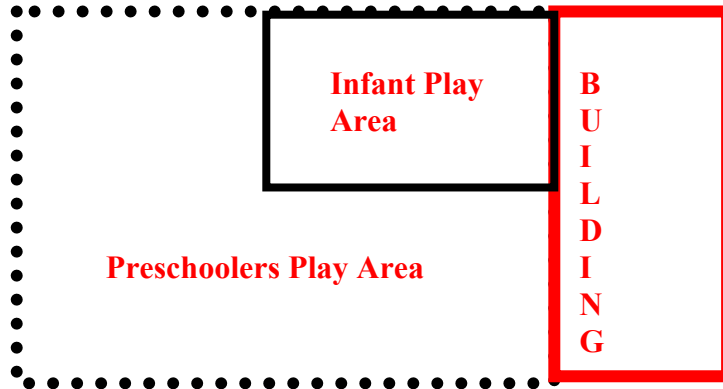
**CHILD CARE RULE .0601**  
**Play Areas**

 Infants and children less than 2 years of age should not use the same play area as older children unless they have different time schedules to use the outdoor play area.

- If fewer than 15 children are in care (center in a residence), separate outdoor play areas for children under 2 years of age are not required.
- When all children must use the same play area, schedules should be set so that young children do not use the area at the same time as older children.
- The outdoor learning environment must be designed so staff are able to see and easily supervise the entire area.



Can you show me an example of how to set up separate outdoor play areas?



- Equipment that is appropriate for older preschool children would be dangerous for a younger age group. Furthermore, the activity level of the older children could jeopardize the safety of infants and toddlers. Thus, a separate play area is required.
- It is helpful to have storage near or in the outdoor learning environment to store items such as balls, tricycles, and other play materials for easy access.
- The outdoor learning environment should be located in close proximity to bathrooms and drinking facilities to ensure staff maintain staff-child ratios and adequate supervision.






**CHILD CARE RULE .1402**  
**Environmental Requirements for the Play Area**







The outdoor play area must provide an area that is shaded, out of direct sunlight.

- Centers can use awnings, buildings, trees, tents or other methods to provide shade for the outdoor learning environment.



## **CHILD CARE RULE .0604**



### **General Safety Requirements for the Play Area**

-  The outdoor play area must be free of hazards.
-  Plants that are toxic shall not be in outdoor space that is used by or is assessable to children.
-  Air conditioning units must be located so that they are not accessible to the children or be fitted with a mesh guard to prevent objects from being thrown into them.
-  Gas tanks must be located so that they are not accessible to children or must be in a protective enclosure or surrounded by a protective guard.
-  Smoking is not permitted in space used by children when children are present.

-  Potentially hazardous items, such as hand and power tools, nails, chemicals, lawn mowers, gasoline, and propane stoves, must be stored in locked areas or with other appropriate safeguards, or removed from the premises.
-  The area must be free of toxic plants.
-  For resources on poisonous plants visit Poisonous Plants of NC at [www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/consumer/poison/poison.htm](http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/consumer/poison/poison.htm).
-  The American Association of Poison Control Centers has created a poison awareness program designed for preschool children. Visit <http://www.aapcc.org/dnn/Home/tabid/36/Default.aspx> for information and resource materials.
-  The United States Environmental Agency provides information on ways to reduce chances of pesticide poisoning. Visit <http://www.epa.gov/pesticides/factsheets/playitsafe.htm> for information and fact sheets. A pesticide is any bait, liquid, powder, or spray used to kill a pest (ants, germs, cockroaches, flies, mice, rats, or termites).
-  Carolinas Poison Center offers emergency telephone resource for poisoning questions and information. Visit [www.ncpoisoncenter.org](http://www.ncpoisoncenter.org) or call 1-800-222-1222.

## **CHILD CARE RULE .0604 & .0605 Inspection Requirements for the Play Area**

-  The outdoor premises must be checked daily for debris, vandalism or broken equipment. Debris must be removed and disposed.
-  A monthly playground inspection must be conducted by a trained individual. A trained administrator or staff member must make a record of each inspection using a playground inspection checklist provided by the Division.

- Monthly playground inspections must be completed by staff that have completed the required safety training.
- The checklist must be signed by the person who conducts the inspection and must be maintained for 12 months in the center's files for review by a representative of the Division.
-  The monthly inspection must be documented on the **Playground Inspection Checklist** form provided by the Division. A copy of this form is located at the end of this chapter in the resource section.
- This inspection will point out any needed maintenance.
- Maintenance of existing surfacing material (such as raking, tilling or fluffing of mulch to prevent packing) may be needed to prolong effectiveness. Replacement of missing surfacing materials is required.
- HH** – It is a good idea to walk around and observe the outdoor area each morning, before children go outside, to ensure that you are able to take care of any problems that occurred during the evening. For example, there may be tree limbs that fell, or trash from neighborhood members that may have used the area during the evening.
-  The law exempts playground equipment on public school grounds used by school-age children from having to meet the child care rules related to the outdoor area, including the playground safety training and completing monthly playground inspection.

## **CHILD CARE RULE .0705 Playground Safety Training Requirements**



- ★ Staff must complete at least 4 clock hours of training in safety approved by the Division.
- ★ For centers licensed for more than 30 children, two staff members must have safety training and one must be the administrator.
- ★ For centers licensed for less than 30 children, only one staff person must have safety training.

- ☑ Training must address playground safety hazards, playground supervision, playground maintenance, general upkeep of the outdoor area, and age and developmentally appropriate playground equipment.
- ☑ Training must be approved by the Division according to the training approval process described in Chapter 2 of this handbook under the Training Approval Process section.
- ☑ Staff counted to comply with this Rule has six months from the date of employment, or from the date a vacancy occurs, to complete the required safety training.
- ☑ Safety training is only required once for an individual as long as they maintain proof of completion, even if they move to another center.
- 🔔 The law exempts playground equipment on public school grounds used by school-age children from having to meet the child care rules related to the outdoor are, including the playground safety training and completing monthly playground inspection.

### **SECTION 5: SUPERVISION AND STAFF-TO-CHILD RATIO REQUIREMENTS**

*All children must be adequately supervised while they participate in outdoor activities. Caregiving staff should be actively involved with the children at all times. Caregivers should be aware of areas that require close supervision such as crawl spaces or high ladders with open entries and be positioned in these areas.*

### **CHILD CARE RULE .0714 & .1402 Supervising the Play Area**

-  Children must be adequately supervised at all times.
-  The outdoor learning environment must be designed so that staff is able to see and easily supervise the entire area.

- Adequate supervision means that staff interacts with the children while moving about the outdoor area. The staff must be able to hear and see the children at all times by positioning themselves to be able to see all areas used by children in the outdoor learning environment.
- HH** - Staff should be mindful of supervising children while children are on slides, climbers, or other tall equipment. Many fatal injuries reported to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission involve falls.
- Interaction with the children should include expanding on their play experiences through communication and suggestions.
- Fencing can be used to close off the play area as an option to prevent children from entering areas that cannot be supervised.
- A staff member must accompany children at all times if there is a need to leave the play area such as for toileting.
- It will require planning to get infants and toddlers from inside to outside and vice versa in order to maintain supervision and staff-child ratios at all times.
- Outside, staff should be actively playing and engaged with the children. Remember to keep interactions with other staff to the minimum.

### **CHILD CARE RULE .0712 & .0713 Staff-Child Ratios for the Play Area**

-  Staff-child ratios must be maintained at all times.

- Staff-child ratios must be maintained outdoors just as they are maintained indoors.
- Staff-child ratios required for the youngest child in the play area must be maintained.

 Refer to Chapter 5 – Indoor Learning Environment for staff-child ratios.


## SECTION 6: OTHER REQUIREMENTS

### CHILD CARE RULE .0512

#### Off-Premise Activities

- ★ When children participate in off-premise activities the following must apply:
  - Children under the age of three must not participate in off-premise activities that involve children being transported in a motor vehicle.
  - When children are transported in a motor vehicle for off-premise activities, Rule .1003 (c) through (i) and (k) of the child care rules apply (refer to Chapter 10 – Transportation Safety).
  - Before staff members walk children off-premises for play or outings, the parent of each child must give written permission for the child to participate in the activity.
  - The facility must post a schedule of off-premise activities in each participating classroom where it can be easily viewed by parents, and a copy must be given to parents. The schedule must be current and include the location of the activity, purpose of the activity, time the activity will take place, date of the activity, and name of the person(s) to be contacted in the event of an emergency.
- ★ When children are taken off the premises, staff must take a list to check attendance when leaving the facility, before leaving the activity, periodically when children are involved in the activity, and upon return to the facility. A list of all center participating in the off-premise activity must also be available at the center.

Off-premise activities refer to any activity which takes place away from a licensed and approved space. This includes activities that occur outside the fenced play area.

 A sample **Off-Premise Activity Authorization** form has been created for use and is located at the end of this chapter in the resource section.



## **SANITATION FOR CHILD CARE CENTERS 15A NCAC 18A .2832(d)**

### **Daily Air Quality**

- ★ If a daily air quality forecast is made by the Division of Air Quality or the regional air quality agency for the county where a center is located, outdoor activity for children should be restricted as follows:
  - Code orange (unhealthy for sensitive group) forecast: children must not be outside participating in physical activity between noon and 8:00 p.m. for more than one hour.
  - Code red (unhealthy) forecast: children must not be outside participating in physical activity between noon and 8:00 p.m. for more than 15 minutes.
  - Code purple (very unhealthy) forecast: children must not be outside participating in physical activity between noon and 8:00 p.m.
- ★ Child care programs must make provisions to allow children with diagnosed asthma or with coughing or wheezing symptoms to participate in physical activity indoors on days when a code orange, red or purple air quality forecast is made.

- ☑ The Air Quality Index (AQI) uses a color-coded system to indicate when the air quality may be a health risk. AQI information can be found in weather reports and newspapers.
- ☑ When the air quality poses a health risk, the early morning is often the only safe time to take children outdoors.
- ☑ For children with asthma, teachers should follow their health care plan recommendations.
- 💻 AQI information can be found in weather reports, newspapers and at from the NC Division of Air Quality's web site <http://daq.state.nc.us/airaware/>.