

## Choosing the Right Playground Safety Surfacing

Choosing the Right Playground Safety Surfacing:

You'll have a variety of different safety surfacing options including pour-in-place rubber, rubber mulch, rubber chips, wood fiber strips, artificial grass and compressed rubber tile. Now there is a difference when it comes to safety and durability. I'll rank each type of surfacing on a scale of 1-5 from high, medium high, medium low and low (1) being the least safe or durable

5 for High

4 for Medium high

3 for Medium

2 for Medium low

1 for Low

(1) Wood fiber strips are the traditional surfacing material that has been used in playground safety for many years. However the durability is low with wood fiber, many playgrounds have surfacing that is moved or spread throughout a park causing a risk for fall heights. Many people who provide playground maintenance find that they often need to replace the wood strips several times a year. I give wood fiber strips a safety rating of 2 and a durability rating of 3.

(2) Pour-in-place was a growing trend in safety surfacing a few years ago because of its immobility and design options. You will find rounded edges or names that are designed into pour-in-place surfacing as well as different colors. The disadvantage with pour-in-place is that it will crack and fade within three years or less. You will also begin to see holes in the top layer (there are two layers) where the rubber has been worn. This is of extreme concern due to safety regulations on the minimum depth of surfacing for a given fall height. Since pour-in-place is fairly new, we've only seen this lack of durability within the past few years causing many people to stay away from this type of safety surfacing. I give pour-in-place a safety rating of 3 and a durability rating of 2.

(3) Rubber mulch is becoming the next generation of wood fiber – the same people that make this also make larger chunks that they refer to as rubber chips. Recycled material is sent through a unique process that cleans and colors the rubber so that it is completely safe for children and has color that lasts as much as seven years. I give rubber mulch and rubber chips a safety rating of 4 and a durability rating of 4.

(4) Artificial turf has been around for a while with some good improvements. The material is placed onto a base of spongy beads that act as a layer of cushioning, much like tilled dirt. Unlike dirt though – this base provides long-lasting safety for anyone who might fall and it allows water to flow freely throughout so that the turf doesn't have water damage. I give artificial turf a safety rating of 4 and a durability rating of 5.

(5) Rubber Tiles are a well-established high-quality surfacing material. There's only one manufacturer of rubber tiles that I would recommend: SofSurfaces has a patented locking system between tiles that created one massive surface for playground safety. This material is also very durable – SofSurfaces provides a solid 7 year guarantee on not only the color but the depth also. That's THREE TIMES longer than the first three safety surfacing options. I give rubber tiles a safety rating of 5 and a durability rating of 5. If you budget allows – this is the ideal choice.

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### About the Author

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