

## *Managing property properly*

# 6 tips to keep private playgrounds safe

**Estates and sectional title complexes should take steps to ensure that children's playgrounds on the property are safe - or risk facing third-party injury claims.**

Many new estates and sectional title complexes offer children's playgrounds now as an added attraction for parents concerned about the safety of public parks and recreation facilities.

However, the current school holidays highlight the need for the home owners' association (HOA) directors or body corporate trustees to check that the equipment and surroundings in their play area are really as safe as they think - or risk facing third-party injury claims against their insurance.

**However, there is much that can be done to prevent these disasters. The following checklist will make the task easier:**

- Make sure that possible falls end in a soft landing by maintaining a shock absorbent groundcover. A 15cm layer of wood chips, mulch or shredded rubber is needed to offer protection for equipment 2m high.
- Make sure protective surfaces extend at least 2m in all directions from stationary playground equipment and four times the height of the suspending bar around swings.
- Make sure no ropes, nets or pet leashes that could be a potential strangulation hazard are attached to the equipment.
- Sand down any sharp edges or protrusions and remove and replace any open s-hooks and protruding bolts.
- Check that openings in guardrails and between ladder rungs pose no hazard. Spaces should be less than 10cm or more than 25cm so that little feet (and heads) will not get stuck.
- Make sure there is adequate spacing between swings. Suspended swings should be at least 20cm apart. The distance between a swing and the support frame and between the ground and underside of the swing seat should also be at least 20cm.
- Swing seats should be made of a soft material and safely secured, and slide surfaces should not pose a burning hazard in hot weather.
- Kotzé says parents and child-minder's should also be reminded to ensure that older children are taught to obey safety rules such as not walking in front of moving swings, and that younger children are preferably fully-supervised at all times while using the playground equipment.