

U.S.



SEARCH TIME.COM



[Subscribe to Time »](#) [Give a Gift »](#)

U.S.

[Main](#) • [The Page](#) • [Politics](#) • [Swampland](#) • [Washington Photo Blog](#) • [Intelligent Cities](#) • [People](#) • [Videos](#)



NEWSLETTERS



MOBILE APPS



ADD TIME NEWS

Families: Where Have All the Swing Sets Gone?

By LAIRD HARRISON/OAKLAND, CALIF. Monday, May. 14, 2001

Subscribe to
TIME Magazine
for just \$1.99



More on TIME.com



Top 10 Famous Ronald Reagan Quotes



It was bright but cool in the backyard of the Duck Pond preschool in Oakland, Calif.--perfect climbing weather. So Chloe Fillinger pulled herself to the top of the play structure, where she reached for the fire fighter's pole, her three-year-old body poised for a fast ride to the bottom. Her hand flailed in empty space. "Cynthia!" she called to her teacher. "The pole is gone!"

Across the country, school fire fighter's poles are falling to hacksaws. Day-care-center swings are tumbling into trash bins. Parks are losing their seesaws, churches their jungle gyms, housing developments their slides. Whole playgrounds have closed, all because safety regulators have raised their standards higher than many owners can afford to reach.

Concerns about safe playgrounds are not new; the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission first published guidelines in 1981. But the rules have gradually become stricter, and in recent years, courts, insurance companies and state governments have given these rules the force of law. Now, with federal regulations passed last year requiring wheelchair access to climbing structures, some playground operators can't afford to replace what they have removed. Says City College of New York environmental psychologist Roger Hart: "I think it's gone too far."

For sure, there are play structures that are unsafe. Many built before the 1970s were little more than steel towers over bare

Most Popular »

[Full List »](#)

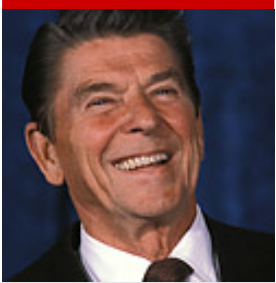
MOST READ

MOST EMAILED

1. The Role Model: What Obama Sees in Reagan
2. Fear of Islamists Paralyzes the U.S.
3. Israel Has Faith Mubarak Will Prevail
4. Tiger Moms: Is Tough Parenting Really the Answer?
5. *The Rite*: Anthony Hopkins Speaks of the Devil
6. Crisis in Cairo: The Latest from Egypt in Turmoil
7. How Pakistan's Largest Religious Minority Has Come Under Siege
8. The Moscow Airport Attack: Were Early Clues Ignored?
9. New Heights: The Cult of NBA Star Blake Griffin
10. How Russia Created Its Own Islamic Terrorism Problem



The 50 Best iPhone Apps of 2011



Ronald Reagan Centennial

asphalt. "A lot of the playgrounds we grew up on were really kind of instruments of torture," says Kathryn Dresslar, a legislative aide who helped bring about new California regulations. In 1999, according to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, a quarter of a million American kids went from playgrounds to emergency rooms.

Even without the new regulations, some playground operators could see that changes were needed. "There were horrible metal pieces and concrete that could cut our children," says Judy Davidson, who successfully lobbied to have climbing equipment removed from Community Elementary School 236, where she teaches in the Bronx, N.Y. But in two years of writing grant proposals, Davidson has been unable to replace what a bulldozer demolished in a few minutes. "You know how important it is for them to have a place to climb and play," she laments.

And therein lies one of the biggest problems for many parks, schools and churches. A medium-size structure that fully complies with federal guidelines costs around \$100,000. Adding to the price are new regulations, issued in October 2000 under the Americans with Disabilities Act, requiring that at least half of every playground be accessible to children in wheelchairs.

Even if they had the money, many small churches and day-care centers don't have the space. The guidelines require that swings be set apart from any other structure, with a clearance both in front and back equal to twice the height of the swings, and 6 ft. of clearance on either side. That's most of the space in some private playgrounds. And since a wheelchair ramp must be 12 ft. long for every foot in height, it is practically impossible for some playgrounds to include structures more than a few feet above ground level.

More News from Our Partners



- Challenger disaster's teachable moment
- Police: Bank robbed, hostage escapes, suspect shot
- Winter-weary Northeast seeks normalcy

HuffingtonPost



Egypt Protests: LIVE Updates As Opposition Fills The Streets



Don Imus: Rachel Maddow 'Worst Kind Of Coward,' 'Gutless, Sniveling Worm' (VIDEO)



Egypt Protests LIVE Updates: Mubarak Protestors Fill Cairo's Streets

Aol News.

Hawaii Bill Would Charge \$100 for Obama Birth



Certificate

Egypt Protests: Demonstrators Take to Streets of Cairo, Suez and Alexandria [VIDEOS]

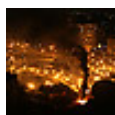
Tiny Superheroes Don Capes and Do Good



- Critics Consensus: The Mechanic Could Use A Tune-Up
- Total Recall: Rutger Hauer's Best Movies
- Disney Animation Celebration: Ranking All The Films Best to Worst!



Top Stories on TIME.com



Eyewitness in Cairo: A Day of Tear Gas, Fire and Shattered Glass



New Heights: The Cult of NBA Star Blake Griffin



Uganda: Mourning Murder of Gay-Rights Activist

Quotes of the Day »



"Madiba is well."

Deputy South African President KGALEMA MOTLANTHE, referring to Nelson Mandela, states that the former South African President is in good spirits as he's discharged after

spending two nights in hospital

[More Quotes »](#)

Your System Status

WE'RE SORRY!

You need to update your Flash Player.



IMPORTANT: After installing the required upgrade please reload this browser window to view the video player.

This content requires the Adobe Flash Player. [Get Flash](#)

Stay Connected with TIME.com

[Learn More »](#)



Subscribe to
RSS Feeds



Sign Up for
Newsletters



Add TIME
Widgets



Read TIME
Mobile on
Your Phone



Become a Fan
of TIME



Get TIME
Twitter
Updates



TIME

© 2011 Time Inc. All rights reserved | [Privacy Policy](#) | [RSS](#) | [Newsletter](#) | [TIME For Kids](#) | [LIFE.com](#)

[Subscribe](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [Media Kit](#) | [Reprints & Permissions](#) | [Opinion Leaders Panel](#) | [Help](#) | [Site Map](#)

**Advertise
with us!**

