

## Top 5 Outdoor safety hazards and what you could do about them

**Once local schools let out for summer break, your apartment complexes will be crawling with energetic children of all ages. Apartment outdoor safety becomes critical. Even if a complex is populated by senior citizens or other childless groups, responsible property management teams must worry about keeping these kids safe. You never know when children from nearby communities will venture into your complex or when a resident may have their grandchildren over for the day.**

If your apartment community is home to many energetic children, then there is even more pressure to keep the property as safe as possible. You want to have faith that parents or babysitters will have a close eye on these children, but you cannot assume that will always happen.

### Know Your Risk Factors

The first step in apartment outdoor safety is assessing the major risks for children in each of your apartment complexes. Depending on the amenities you offer your residents, there will be different risk factors for different communities. Some of the most common risk factors for children during the summer months include:

1. Swimming pools
2. Swing sets
3. Climbing apparatus
4. Ladders for maintenance crews
5. Other tools and machinery

You can lessen the degree of risk from ladders, tools and machinery by ensuring your workers know to keep these items picked up at all times. Ensure workers know not to leave tall ladders erected against apartments, poles or other structures without supervision. It only takes a moment for a child to see the ladder and start climbing. It only takes one game of hide and seek for a child's foot to find a rusty nail left in the grass.

Swimming pools and playground equipment are other areas where you should invest your time in terms of apartment outdoor safety.

The United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that accidental drowning was the leading cause of injury related deaths in children between the ages of one and four between 2005 and 2009. They added that close to 4,000 people died from accidental drowning in that period of time, and nearly 6,000 were treated in hospitals for injuries sustained in the water. Children under the age of four were the most likely victims and swimming pools were the most common bodies of water involved in these incidents.

The CDC has also reported that around 200,000 children under the age of fourteen are seen in emergency rooms every year for injuries received on playgrounds. They estimated that nearly half of these injuries were severe. Even more alarming,

nearly 150 children under the age of fourteen died from playground injuries between 1990 and 2000.

If you offer play areas and/or swimming pools to your residents, you have to pay close attention to apartment outdoor safety all year long, but especially during the summer months when children spend more time outdoors unsupervised by parents.

### Swimming Pool Safety

Families with children are drawn to apartment complexes that offer swimming pools. It gives children of all ages something to do in the summer, and it is a place for families to spend time together without spending money. You can attract more people to your apartments by offering a nice pool, but you have to take some actions to ensure safety for everyone in your pool. Some things to consider include:

- Make sure the pool area is surrounded by a tall fence with a locked gate, or have a building that must be passed through to enter the pool. This reduces the chance of small children wandering into the pool and drowning when it is not in operation.
- Ensure you have life jackets and other rescue and safety equipment close to the pool. Make lifeguards or other supervisory staff aware of how to use these items.
- Set an age limit on children going to the pool without adult supervision. Make sure there is a way to ensure this rule is being strictly adhered to on a daily basis.
- Consider a limit on the number of children under the age of 14 entering the pool with a single adult. There is more likely to be a drowning if one adult is trying to keep an eye on too many children.
- Consider hiring a small team of lifeguards. You can often get college students to take on these jobs for low wages, but make sure they have basic lifeguard training. A small pool will only need one guard on duty at a time.
- Include a small kiddy pool for parents, babies and toddlers. This keeps the little ones separate from rowdy teenagers.
- Do not allow alcoholic beverages in the pool area and have intoxicated residents removed from the area promptly.
- Implement safety rules, such as no running on the pavement around the pool, no diving in shallow areas, and no pushing others into the pool.

### Playground Safety

The CDC has identified strangulation and falls as the two leading causes of death from playground accidents. This is something you have to take seriously, since they estimate that about 70% of playground deaths between 1990 and 2000 took place on home play sets. Since children call your apartment complex their home, you might as well consider your play area their home play set. Here are a few ideas of ways you can protect children on your playground:

- Replace older equipment that may be falling apart, rusted, loose, etc.
- Make sure all elements of the play sets are in proper working order at all times.
- Make sure play equipment includes barriers so small children are less likely to fall off of high ledges and sides.
- Set an age limit for children playing in this area without adult supervision.

- Post warning signs that will clearly be seen by those visiting the playground. Make a sign for any potential danger for the equipment you have on your property. Some equipment can be dangerous if not used properly, even when in proper working order.
- Apartment outdoor safety is something to think about all year round, even if you do close your swimming pool down for the winter. By constantly staying alert to dangers, keeping everything in proper working order, and making sure to warn residents of potential dangers, you can lower the likelihood of claims that you put children in danger.

Do you have a safety story to tell? What is your experience as the warmer weather approaches?

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