



*The City of New York
Office of the Comptroller
Bureau of Management Audit*

WILLIAM C. THOMPSON, JR.
Comptroller

**Audit Report on the Effectiveness of the
Department of Parks and Recreation
in Maintaining City Playgrounds**

MJ02-066A

May 14, 2002

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Department of Parks and Recreation
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The principal mission of the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (Parks) is to ensure that the parks and recreational areas (e.g., gardens, marinas, stadiums, squares) of the City are clean, safe, and attractive for the health and enjoyment of people. Parks maintains approximately 28,000 acres throughout the City, managing more than 1,700 parks and recreation facilities. These properties include 614 ball fields, 550 tennis courts, 43 swimming pools, 14 miles of beaches, 13 golf courses—and 971 playgrounds used especially by children and equipped with play facilities.

The maintenance and operation of parks and recreational facilities managed by Parks fall under its Operations division. To measure how well Operations maintains parks and recreational facilities, the Parks Operations and Management Planning (OMP) division has established the Parks Inspection Program (PIP). PIP inspectors evaluate various park “features” (such as litter conditions and paved surfaces) and document the results in site inspection reports that include recommendations outlining the work needed.

In fiscal year 2001, Parks spent \$164,100,124 on park maintenance; \$130,972,673 of this amount was for personal service.

Objective

The objective of this audit was to determine whether Parks adequately maintains and inspects playground areas at City parks.

Scope and Methodology

The scope for this audit was July 2000 through February 2002. We assessed the cleanliness and safety of the playgrounds, as well as the maintenance and availability of the play equipment.

We requested all documents setting out procedures and standards that PIP inspectors must follow when conducting inspections. We identified the various features tested by inspectors and reviewed the standards they employed in assessing ratings for each feature.

To determine whether playground areas were clean, safe, and well maintained, we sampled 48 playgrounds throughout the City, randomly selected from within community board districts identified by highest and lowest percentages of families receiving public assistance. We conducted our first inspections from June through July 2001, and revisited the sites in December 2001 and January 2002 to determine whether the conditions we observed during our first visits remained.

To determine whether the conditions we observed were consistent with those found by PIP inspectors, we compared our findings with those documented in PIP site inspection reports.

We conducted our audit in accordance with Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards (GAGAS) and included tests of the records and other auditing procedures considered necessary. This audit was performed in accordance with the New York City Comptroller's audit responsibilities as set forth in Chapter 5, § 93, of the New York City Charter.

Results in Brief

Parks satisfactorily maintained 42 (88%) of the 48 playgrounds that we sampled in regard to overall cleanliness, based on our inspection of these parks from June through July 2001. During our second visits to these parks in December 2001 and January 2002, the overall cleanliness of all 48 playgrounds was satisfactory. Furthermore, Parks fixes unsafe conditions that are identified. We did not observe any clear health or safety hazards (e.g., broken play equipment) at the playgrounds we visited. The conditions we observed correspond with Parks's own inspections. For fiscal year 2001, Parks reported, based on PIP inspections, 91 percent of the City's small parks (including playgrounds) were acceptably clean, and 84 percent were in satisfactory condition overall.

Overall, the vast majority of play equipment was present in the playgrounds we visited. However, when equipment is missing, it may not be

replaced for six months or longer. Of the 25 swings that were missing during our first visits, only 13 had been replaced by the time we visited the playgrounds approximately six months later. According to PIP inspection reports, 14 percent of all swings citywide were missing during inspections conducted during the period July 2001 through February 2002.

Recommendation

The audit resulted in one recommendation, specifically, that Parks should improve its timeliness in replacing play equipment that is missing from playground areas.

Parks Response

The matters covered in this report were discussed with Parks officials during and at the conclusion of this audit. A preliminary draft report was sent to Parks officials and was discussed at an exit conference held on April 11, 2002. On April 18, 2002, we submitted a draft report to Parks officials with a request for comments. We received a written response from Parks officials on May 1, 2002. Parks officials agreed with the audit findings and recommendation and stated:

“We are very pleased that your overall findings have indicated that playground areas at City parks were adequately maintained and inspected. . . .

“Parks will continue to place a high priority on replacing play equipment, in this case, swings. Usually, swings are replaced in the spring when usage begins to climb.”

The full text of Parks’s comments is included as an addendum to this report.

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INTRODUCTION

Background

The principal mission of the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (Parks) is to ensure that the parks and recreational areas (e.g., gardens, marinas, stadiums, squares) of the City are clean, safe, and attractive for the health and enjoyment of people. Parks maintains approximately 28,000 acres throughout the City, managing more than 1,700 parks and recreation facilities. These properties include 614 ball fields, 550 tennis courts, 43 swimming pools, 14 miles of beaches, 13 golf courses—and 971 playgrounds used especially by children and equipped with play facilities.

The maintenance and operation of parks and recreational facilities managed by Parks fall under its Operations division. To measure how well Operations maintains parks and recreational facilities, the Parks Operations and Management Planning (OMP) division has established the Parks Inspection Program (PIP). PIP inspectors evaluate various park “features” (such as litter conditions and paved surfaces) and document the results in site inspection reports that include recommendations outlining the work needed.

In 1998, the New York State Comptroller (State) conducted an audit of the maintenance of small parks and playgrounds by Parks, covering April 1995 through October 1996. In that audit, the State cited Parks’s own finding that the overall condition of 45 percent of the City’s small parks and playgrounds was unsatisfactory. Moreover, the State noted that the condition of the play equipment its auditors observed was unsatisfactory in 76 percent of the sites visited.

In fiscal year 2001, Parks spent \$164,100,124 on park maintenance; \$130,972,673 of this amount was for personal service.

Objective

The objective of this audit was to determine whether Parks adequately maintains and inspects playground areas at City parks.

Scope and Methodology

The scope for this audit was July 2000 through February 2002. We assessed the cleanliness and safety of the playgrounds, as well as the maintenance and availability of the play equipment. We did not assess Parks's maintenance of other playground facilities, such as water fountains and comfort stations, nor did we evaluate its capital efforts at the playgrounds (e.g., adding new play equipment).

To obtain an understanding of the maintenance and inspection of City parks by Parks, we interviewed key personnel, including the Director of OMP and the Operations Borough Chiefs for three boroughs, and reviewed the Parks procedures relevant to those areas.

To determine whether OMP had effective control procedures and official standards regarding PIP inspections, we requested all documents setting out procedures and standards that PIP inspectors must follow when conducting inspections.

To gain an understanding of the methodology used by PIP inspectors when inspecting parks, we accompanied an inspector on visits to eight parks. We identified the various features tested by the inspector and reviewed the standards he employed in assessing ratings for each feature. To determine the thoroughness of the PIP inspection, we independently evaluated the conditions at the eight parks that we visited, documented our observations, and compared them to the findings in the site inspection reports prepared by the inspector.

To determine whether PIP had a system for tracking inspections, we met with PIP management and reviewed the basic features of their computerized system and how they maintained inspection records.

To determine whether PIP inspection results were reported to Operations, the division responsible for maintaining the parks, we met with Operations management and discussed the information they receive from OMP and any other interaction between the two divisions.

To determine whether playground areas were clean, safe, and well maintained, we selected a sample of 48 playgrounds from the 971 throughout the City. The sample included playgrounds in each of the five boroughs, and was randomly selected within community board districts identified by highest and lowest percentages of families receiving public assistance. For each borough, we selected playgrounds within the community board districts with the highest and lowest percentages of income support. We conducted our first inspections from June through July 2001, and evaluated the condition of the playgrounds based on a number of features and categories: cleanliness—litter, glass, graffiti; safety—safety surfaces, play equipment, and benches; and availability—presence or absence of play equipment.

To determine whether PIP inspectors had visited the parks in our sample, we requested all site inspection reports for the most recent inspections of the 48 parks, as of January 2002. To determine whether the conditions we observed were consistent with those found by PIP inspectors, we compared our findings with those documented in the site inspection reports.

To determine whether the conditions we observed during our first visits remained, especially in regard to missing equipment, we revisited the 48 playgrounds in December 2001 and January 2002.

We conducted our audit in accordance with Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards (GAGAS) and included tests of the records and other auditing procedures considered necessary. This audit was performed in accordance with the New York City Comptroller's audit responsibilities as set forth in Chapter 5, § 93, of the New York City Charter.

Parks Response

The matters covered in this report were discussed with Parks officials during and at the conclusion of this audit. A preliminary draft report was sent to Parks officials and was discussed at an exit conference held on April 11, 2002. On April 18, 2002, we submitted a draft report to Parks officials with a request for comments. We received a written response from Parks officials on May 1, 2002. Parks officials agreed with the audit findings and recommendation and stated:

“We are very pleased that your overall findings have indicated that playground areas at City parks were adequately maintained and inspected. . . .

“Parks will continue to place a high priority on replacing play equipment, in this case, swings. Usually, swings are replaced in the spring when usage begins to climb.”

The full text of Parks's comments is included as an addendum to this report.

OFFICE OF THE COMPTROLLER NEW YORK CITY

DATE FILED: May 14, 2002

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Parks satisfactorily maintained 42 (88%) of the 48 playgrounds that we sampled in regard to overall cleanliness, based on our inspection of these parks from June through July 2001. During our second visits to these parks in December 2001 and January 2002, the overall cleanliness of all 48 playgrounds was satisfactory. Furthermore, Parks fixes unsafe conditions that are identified. We did not observe any clear health or safety hazards (e.g., broken play equipment) at the playgrounds we visited.

The conditions we observed correspond with Parks's own inspections. For fiscal year 2001, Parks reported, based on PIP inspections, 91 percent of the City's small parks (including playgrounds) were acceptably clean, and 84 percent were in satisfactory condition overall.

In regard to play equipment, the vast majority of the required equipment at the sites we visited was in place. However, when equipment is missing, it may not be replaced for six months or longer. For the 48 playgrounds we visited during our first inspections, only 25 (7%) of the 340 sets of swing-hangers (fasteners used to hold swings) were missing swings. (We did not observe any other missing play equipment.) During our second inspections, however, we found that only 13 of the 25 missing swings had been replaced. (In addition, an additional seven swing-hanger sets were empty.) For the period July 2001 through February 2002, PIP inspectors recorded that 14 percent of swings were missing during inspections.

Maintenance and Inspection **Overview**

Operations is responsible for the maintenance and operation of all parks and recreational facilities under the administration of Parks. Operations employs work crews to maintain the parks daily. There are generally three types of crews:

- Fixed post—assigned to one park to perform regular cleaning and maintenance work.
- Split post—assigned to two or more parks to perform regular cleaning and maintenance work. May be rotated from park to park.
- Mobile post—has fixed route; visits various parks to perform regular cleaning and maintenance work.

Work crews consist of regular park workers who perform general cleaning and light maintenance work (e.g., paint benches, cut hanging tree branches) at the parks. In fiscal year 2001, Parks employed 1,543 park workers and 2,469 Work Experience Program (WEP)¹ participants to perform regular cleaning and maintenance in the City parks.

¹ The Work Experience Program (WEP) is administered by the City Human Resources Administration. It assigns public assistance participants to work assignments in government and not-for-profit agencies throughout New York City.

Supervisors of Parks and Maintenance Operations (SPMOs) supervise work crews. SPMOs are responsible for overseeing the maintenance of all parks in regions called sectors, and are required to visit all work sites in their sectors daily. SPMOs report to Parks Recreation Managers (PRMs), who oversee districts, which consist of one to three sectors. PRMs in turn report to Borough Chiefs, who oversee the maintenance and operations of all parks and recreational facilities in their respective boroughs.

If an SPMO identifies a condition requiring more extensive work than the work crew can provide, such as removing graffiti from a park statue, the SPMO prepares a work order request and forwards it to the PRM of the borough workshop where the work is to be completed by skilled trades workers (such as carpenters, plumbers, and electricians). According to the Parks modified budget, the agency employed 203 skilled trades workers in fiscal year 2001.

The responsibility for measuring the performance of Operations in maintaining parks and recreational facilities falls to OMP, which uses PIP for this task. According to Parks officials, PIP has seven inspectors who perform more than 4,000 inspections per year. Inspections take place in two-week intervals called “rounds.” For each round, the OMP Director stated that he uses OMP’s database to randomly select approximately 205 ratable sites to be visited, which the director assigns to the inspectors. Ratable sites fall under three categories: large parks, small parks (includes playgrounds), and Greenstreets². There are approximately 2,600 ratable sites citywide. (Large parks are divided into smaller zones to make inspecting these parks more feasible.)

Inspectors use hand-held computers and digital cameras to document the conditions they observe. Sites are rated in three categories (subdivided into 16 park features): cleanliness, structural, and landscape. Features are rated either “acceptable” or “unacceptable.” In regard to cleanliness, a park is rated unacceptable if two or more cleanliness features are rated unacceptable, or if one feature is rated “very unacceptable.” Sites also receive an overall rating. If a park fails cleanliness, it automatically receives an overall rating of unacceptable. It also receives an overall rating of unacceptable if any three features are unacceptable, or if any one feature is very unacceptable.

Inspectors prepare site inspection reports for each site visited. The results of the inspection reports are downloaded into the OMP computerized inspection tracking system. The system uses this information to generate a summary report at the end of each round, showing the citywide and borough-wide results of the inspections performed that round; this report is uploaded to the Operations borough offices and upper-level management. Summary ratings are also produced for each inspection season—spring, summer, fall, and winter—and for the year. Parks reports the summary ratings in the Mayor’s Management Report each fiscal year (July through June).

Parks officials stated that the end-of-the-round summary report is discussed at upper-level management meetings conducted at the end of each round. The Commissioner, First Deputy Commissioner, and the Borough Commissioners (who are charged with overseeing park

² Greenstreets is a joint program with the Department of Transportation in which paved street properties, such as triangles and malls, are converted into green spaces.

maintenance) attend these meetings. At the meeting, Borough Commissioners are provided with copies of the site inspection reports for the parks in their boroughs that were visited during the round.

A Borough Commissioner who disagrees with the results of an inspection can appeal the results to a PIP Ombudsman. The Ombudsman is an independent third party not involved in the inspection (e.g., a member from the First Deputy's staff) who acts as an arbitrator. The Ombudsman's decision in the appeal is binding.

Parks are Kept Acceptably Clean, and Hazardous Conditions are Abated

The playgrounds throughout the City are kept in a satisfactorily clean condition, based on our inspections of 48 sites. Forty-two (88%) of the sites we visited were satisfactorily clean during our first set of inspections; all 48 sites were satisfactorily clean during our second set of inspections, approximately six months later. Also, there were no obvious instances of health or safety hazards. Our observations coincided with Parks's own evaluation of small parks throughout the City: PIP inspections found that 91 percent of the sites (which included playgrounds) were acceptably clean and 84 percent were in acceptable overall condition in fiscal year 2001. As a result, it appears that Parks is doing a satisfactory job in ensuring that City parks are cleaned and that dangerous conditions are corrected.

To determine whether Parks adequately maintains playgrounds to ensure that they are clean and that dangerous conditions are corrected promptly, we selected a sample of 48³ playgrounds to visit throughout the five boroughs. The playgrounds were selected randomly within community board districts in each of the five boroughs. The districts were selected based on the percentage of families receiving public assistance. For each borough, we selected playgrounds within the community board districts with the highest and lowest percentages of income support.⁴ The breakdown per borough, by district, is shown in Table I, below.

³ The original sample size was 50. We were unable to visit two playgrounds (one in Manhattan and one in Staten Island) because they were not at the location indicated on the DPR web site, bringing the number of playgrounds we inspected to 48.

⁴ Income support data obtained from the New York City Department of City Planning's Year 2000 Community District Profile.

TABLE I

Playgrounds Visited by Auditors,
Selected Based on Income Support Level of Community Board

Borough	Community Boards with highest % income support	Number of playgrounds visited	Community Boards with lowest % income support	Number of playgrounds visited	Total number of playgrounds visited
Bronx	CB #3	5	CB #10	5	10
Brooklyn	CB #4	5	CB #10	5	10
Manhattan	CB #11	5	CB #8	4	9
Queens	CB #3	5	CB #11	5	10
Staten Island	CB #1	5	CB #3	4	9
Totals		25		23	48

We evaluated the categories of cleanliness and safety based on the following features, using the general criteria indicated on Table II, below. (These features are also evaluated as part of PIP.)

TABLE II

Categories, Features, and Criteria for Evaluations

Category	Feature	Unacceptable Rating
Cleanliness	Litter	Ten or more square feet containing debris
	Glass	Large pieces of broken glass in the play area
	Graffiti	More than one or two lines of graffiti within playground; any instances of offensive language
Safety	Safety surface	Loose or unsecured safety mats, worn surface; safety surface missing in areas
	Benches	Missing slats, exposed screws and bolts, large splinters, exposed concrete bases
	Play equipment	Broken or unstable equipment, missing or severely worn pieces, exposed screws and bolts

We conducted our first visits from June through July 2001. We considered a playground to be unsatisfactory regarding overall cleanliness if two or more cleanliness features were unsatisfactory. We considered a playground to be unsatisfactory regarding its overall condition if the overall cleanliness was unsatisfactory, two or more safety features were unsatisfactory, or if a hazardous condition (e.g., broken equipment, missing safety surface) was identified. Overall, 42 (88%) of the 48 parks were satisfactorily clean. In regard to safety, at seven playgrounds safety surfaces were worn in some places or loose, but we did not deem them to be hazardous or to warrant immediate corrective action by Parks. The results of our inspections are shown in Table III, which follows:

TABLE IIIResults of Auditors' First Inspection

Feature	Satisfactory		Unsatisfactory	
	# of playgrounds	%	# of playgrounds	%
Litter	39	81%	9	19%
Glass	45	94%	3	6%
Graffiti	39	81%	9	19%
Cleanliness (overall)	42	88%	6	12%
Safety Surfaces	41	85%	7	15%
Benches	48	100%	0	0%
Play Equipment	48	100%	0	0%
Overall Condition	42	88%	6	12%

The results of our inspections in regard to overall cleanliness, segregated by borough and income support level, are shown in Table IV, following.

TABLE IVNumber of Sites Evaluated as Satisfactory in Overall Cleanliness by Auditors Segregated by Borough and Income Support Level

Borough	Sites Rated Overall Clean		
	CBs* with large % income support	CBs with small % income support	Borough-wide
	# clean/ total # visited	# clean/total # visited	# clean/total # visited
Bronx	5/5	3/5	8/10
Brooklyn	3/5	5/5	8/10
Manhattan	5/5	4/4	9/9
Queens	5/5	4/5	9/10
Staten Island	5/5	3/4	8/9
Totals	23/25	19/23	42/48

*Community Boards

As shown in Table IV, the cleanliness of the playgrounds visited appears consistent among boroughs and districts with large and small income support levels. We revisited the 48 playgrounds in December 2001 and January 2002 to determine whether the conditions we saw persisted. All 48 playgrounds were satisfactory in regard to overall cleanliness, and the safety

surfaces at the seven playgrounds we cited during the first inspection had been repaired. (We had not shared the results of our first set of inspections with Parks.)

To understand the methodology PIP inspectors use in evaluating parks, we interviewed a senior PIP inspector and received an overview of the inspection process. Overall, PIP inspectors employ a comprehensive technique in evaluating parks. Table V, following, shows the categories and features that PIP inspectors review:

TABLE V

Parks Categories and Features Used for Park Inspections

Cleanliness	Landscape	Structural
Glass*	Lawns*	Benches*
Graffiti*	Trees*	Fences*
Litter*	Athletic Fields	Paved Surfaces*
Weeds*	Horticultural Areas	Safety Surface*
	Trails	Play Equipment*
	Water Bodies	Sidewalk*

*Features applicable to playgrounds

To limit inspectors’ subjectivity, PIP uses detailed guidelines in determining whether a feature is in acceptable condition. For instance, a playground would be rated “unacceptable” for glass if:

- Three or more areas (each approximately 125 square feet) had moderate amounts of glass (small pieces of glass equivalent to 2-3 broken bottles or large pieces of glass equivalent to 1-2 broken bottles)
- One or more areas had heavy amounts of glass (small pieces equivalent to four or more bottles or large pieces equivalent to three or more bottles)
- The quantity is moderate at the overall site for a very small playground

To learn how inspectors actually perform inspections, we accompanied an inspector as he visited eight sites. The inspector performed a comprehensive inspection at each site. For instance, the inspector checked the wear and tear on the swing hooks that hold the swing seats. The inspector also checked the caulking on slides to ensure that clothing would not get caught on it.

The inspectors use hand-held computers to enter their ratings of park features. They are required to take pictures of all reportable conditions for inclusion with their inspection reports. Inspectors do not rate a park for a feature if there are park workers at the site performing work related to that feature. For instance, a park will not be rated for litter if a crew is cleaning up litter at the time of the inspector’s visit.

To determine whether the conditions we observed at the 48 sampled playgrounds were similar to those observed during PIP inspections, we reviewed the most recent PIP inspection reports for the 48 playgrounds, as of January 2002. The reports were comprehensive and

covered the same areas identified by the PIP inspector we previously accompanied. The results of the PIP inspections of the 48 playgrounds are shown in Table VI, following. (This table does not list all features PIP evaluated, only those we also used in our evaluation.)

TABLE VI

Results of PIP Inspections for 48 Sampled Sites

Feature	Acceptable		Unacceptable	
	# of Playgrounds	%	# of Playgrounds	%
Glass*	46	98%	1	2%
Graffiti*	42	89%	5	11%
Litter*	41	93%	3	7%
Cleanliness (overall)	45	94%	3	6%
Benches	47	98%	1	2%
Play Equipment*	34	72%	13	28%
Safety Surfaces*	41	89%	5	11%
Overall Condition	42	88%	6	12%

*Feature was not rated at all 48 playgrounds

As shown in Table VI, PIP inspectors found that the cleanliness and overall condition of the sites were generally acceptable when they visited them. In reviewing the PIP inspection results, we observed that some features were not rated at some sites. As previously stated, an inspector does not rate a park for a feature if that feature is being worked on at the time of the inspection. In that instance, the inspection report lists the feature, but records an “N” (for “not rated”). According to the PIP director, inspectors prompt the hand-held computers to bring up the features they rate. This information is printed onto an inspection report.

However, for some of the 48 sampled playgrounds, the PIP inspection reports did not even mention some of the park features, meaning that these features were not evaluated as required. Nonetheless, we believe that these were oversights by the inspectors and did not materially affect the overall rating that these sites received.

To determine how the 48 playgrounds we visited compared with all small parks and playgrounds, we reviewed the citywide PIP inspection results for small parks (including playgrounds) for fiscal year 2001. These citywide results are shown in Table VII, following.

TABLE VII

Citywide Results of PIP Inspections of Small Parks and Playgrounds
Fiscal Year 2001

Feature*	% of Sites Rated Acceptable
Litter	80%
Glass	97%
Graffiti	92%
Cleanliness (overall)	91%
Benches	95%
Play Equipment	85%
Safety Surface	89%
Overall Condition	84%

*This table does not list all features PIP evaluated, only those we also used in our evaluation.

Based on our observations at the sampled 48 playgrounds and the findings of PIP inspections citywide, it appears that Parks is doing a satisfactory job of maintaining playgrounds in the areas of cleanliness and safety throughout the City.

Missing Play Equipment May Not Be Replaced During Season

Overall, the vast majority of play equipment was present in the playgrounds we visited. However, when equipment is missing, it may not be replaced for six months or longer. Of the 25 swings that were missing during our first visits, only 13 had been replaced by the time we visited the playgrounds approximately six months later. According to PIP inspection reports, 14 percent of all swings citywide were missing during inspections conducted during the period July 2001 through February 2002.

Generally, regular maintenance work crews are responsible for repairing conditions found at the parks. However, if the needed work is beyond the ability of the regular maintenance work crews to handle, an SPMO will prepare a work order so that the work can be done by skilled trades workers or contractors. According to Parks procedures, work orders should be completed within 14 days, provided the needed parts are in stock.

If a PIP inspector or an SPMO identifies play equipment that is in disrepair and presents a hazard, the equipment is to be removed immediately (within 24 hours). In order to replace the equipment, a work order must be prepared.

The equipment at the playgrounds we visited included swings, jungle gyms, and slides. During our first inspections of the 48 sampled playgrounds, we found no play equipment that was in disrepair and presented a hazard. In addition, the vast majority of play equipment was in

place. Of the 340 sets of swing-hangers (fasteners used to hold swings), only 25 (7%) were missing swings. (The missing swings were at nine of the playgrounds.) We did not note other missing play equipment.

We revisited the 48 playgrounds in December 2001 and January 2002 to determine whether conditions had changed. Again, we found no play equipment that was in disrepair and presented a hazard. Regarding missing equipment, we saw that only 19 (6%) of the 340 sets of swing hangers were empty. However, 12 of these had been missing during our first visits, approximately six months before.

PIP inspectors generally do not report on missing equipment as a ratable feature, unless at least one-third of a site's play equipment is missing or unusable. (In such a case, the play equipment feature is rated unacceptable.) Missing equipment is noted by inspectors, however, as a footnote in the inspection reports and is included in the summary reports generated for the program. According to the PIP Ratings report, an average of 24 percent of all swings citywide were reported missing during inspections performed in fiscal year 2001. That percentage dropped to 14 percent for fiscal year 2002 through February 2002.

We discussed the replacement of play equipment with Parks officials. The Bronx Borough Chief of Operations stated that play equipment is usually replaced during the spring, and the Manhattan Borough Chief said that equipment is generally not replaced when park attendance is low.

Parks's efforts are commendable in evaluating whether play equipment is safe for the public and in immediately removing equipment that it deems to be hazardous. However, to ensure that the public can take full advantage of the services provided in City playgrounds, Parks should improve its timeliness in replacing missing equipment.

Recommendation

1. The Department of Parks and Recreation should improve its timeliness in replacing play equipment that is missing from playground areas.

Parks Response: "Parks will continue to place a high priority on replacing play equipment, in this case, swings. Usually, swings are replaced in the spring when usage begins to climb."



City of New York
Parks & Recreation

Addendum

The Arsenal
Central Park
New York, New York 10021

Adrian Benepe
Commissioner

May 1, 2002

Mr. Roger D. Liwer
Assistant Comptroller for Audits
The City of New York
Office of the Comptroller
1 Center Street, Room 1100 North
New York, N. Y. 10007-2341

Re: Audit Report on the Effectiveness of the
Department of Parks and Recreation in
Maintaining City Playgrounds
Audit Number MJ02-066A

Dear Mr. Liwer:

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on your draft report before its public release.

We are very pleased that your overall findings have indicated that playground areas at City parks were adequately maintained and inspected. Contrary to the audit conducted by the New York State Comptroller's Office in 1998, results of your review have supported the agency's effectiveness in maintaining the City playgrounds, as well as the integrity and reliability of our inspection program.

Parks will continue to place a high priority on replacing play equipment; in this case, swings. Usually, swings are replaced in the spring when usage begins to climb.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please call me at (212) 360-8265.

Sincerely,

David Stark
Chief Fiscal Officer

cc: Adrian Benepe
Robert Garafola
Susan Kupferman