



**The Public Advocate for the City of New York**

*Improving Access to City Services*

**Betsy Gotbaum**  
Public Advocate

July 21, 2008

Adrian Benepe  
Commissioner, NYC Dept. of Parks and Recreation  
The Arsenal  
Central Park  
830 5th Avenue  
New York, NY 10021

**By Fax and US Mail**

Dear Commissioner Benepe:

I am disturbed by published reports of young children sustaining serious burn injuries on the black rubber surface installed in city playgrounds. One such report quotes hospital physicians who treat more than a dozen children each year with burns from these mats. It is unacceptable that children suffer severe and avoidable injuries due to equipment installed and maintained by the city.

Signs warning against bare feet on the playground are not sufficient to ensure children's safety. Children may touch the surface of these rubber mats with their hands or other parts of their bodies, including their faces, in the course of playing or as a result of a fall. Furthermore, signage only in English may not be sufficient in neighborhoods with a large immigrant population.

I am therefore calling on you to treat the surfaces of the black rubber playground mats to prevent burning or replace them with a safer alternative, such as playground surfacing in lighter colors, as recommended in a recent U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission handbook. In addition, the Parks Department should ensure that all city playgrounds have adequate signage in all appropriate languages and identify alternatives to all equipment in city playgrounds that can cause burn injuries to young children, including equipment with bare metal exposed to direct sunlight.

I look forward to your written response. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 212-669-4102.

Sincerely,

Betsy Gotbaum

