

Playgrounds being upgraded to meet new safety standards

CSA's revised standards designed to keep kids safe

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deemed hazardous or impractical to repair.

The Oakmeadow playground is in the process of being replaced and the playground in Lorne Park has reopened.

Although there have been no reports of serious injury, Georgina's manager of facility and park development, Brock McDonald, said the town is taking a pro-active approach to providing playgrounds that meet safety standards.

"The safety of children is the number one thing to protect. It would make sense to repair the equipment," said McDonald, who estimates the cost of replacing and repairing playgrounds will be about \$110,000.

"We want to protect the residents and the children to the best of our ability and protect the town (from liability) as well."

McDonald said the majority of injuries that occur on the town's playgrounds result from falls.

"A number of times, we've had to go in and provide softer material, like wood chips instead of pea gravel, on the ground," he said.

According to Aurora's director of leisure services, Allan

Downey, no playgrounds in that town have been dismantled so far, but two aging playgrounds, in Summit and Tom's Parks, have had to be repaired. However, they were not necessarily repaired because of the new safety standards.

"Aurora continues to inspect playgrounds for safety hazards on a monthly basis," said Downey, who added that a new playground is being built this year in Bayview Vandorf Park. "Whenever it gets to the point where we can no longer make modifications or the play value and safety are compromised, we put forth a proposal to fund a replacement for the playground."

In the next decade, 10 park playgrounds will be replaced, retrofitted or upgraded and nine new playgrounds built to meet CSA guidelines. The total cost of the upgrades and new playgrounds will be about \$17 million, which will be allocated in future budgets.

The town has embarked on an all municipal playground rejuvenation program in an ongoing effort to provide safe play for children and residents, said Downey.

"If we see a maintenance issue or safety hazard, we will repair it because we don't want any playground in town that is unsafe," he said.

There are 44 municipal parks and open spaces in Newmarket, but only 13 playgrounds have been modified because of age or because they did not meet CSA safety standards.

"(The repairs) were done in

conjunction with the standards, although we conduct our own ongoing inspections," said Virginia Hackson, Newmarket's acting manager of special services.

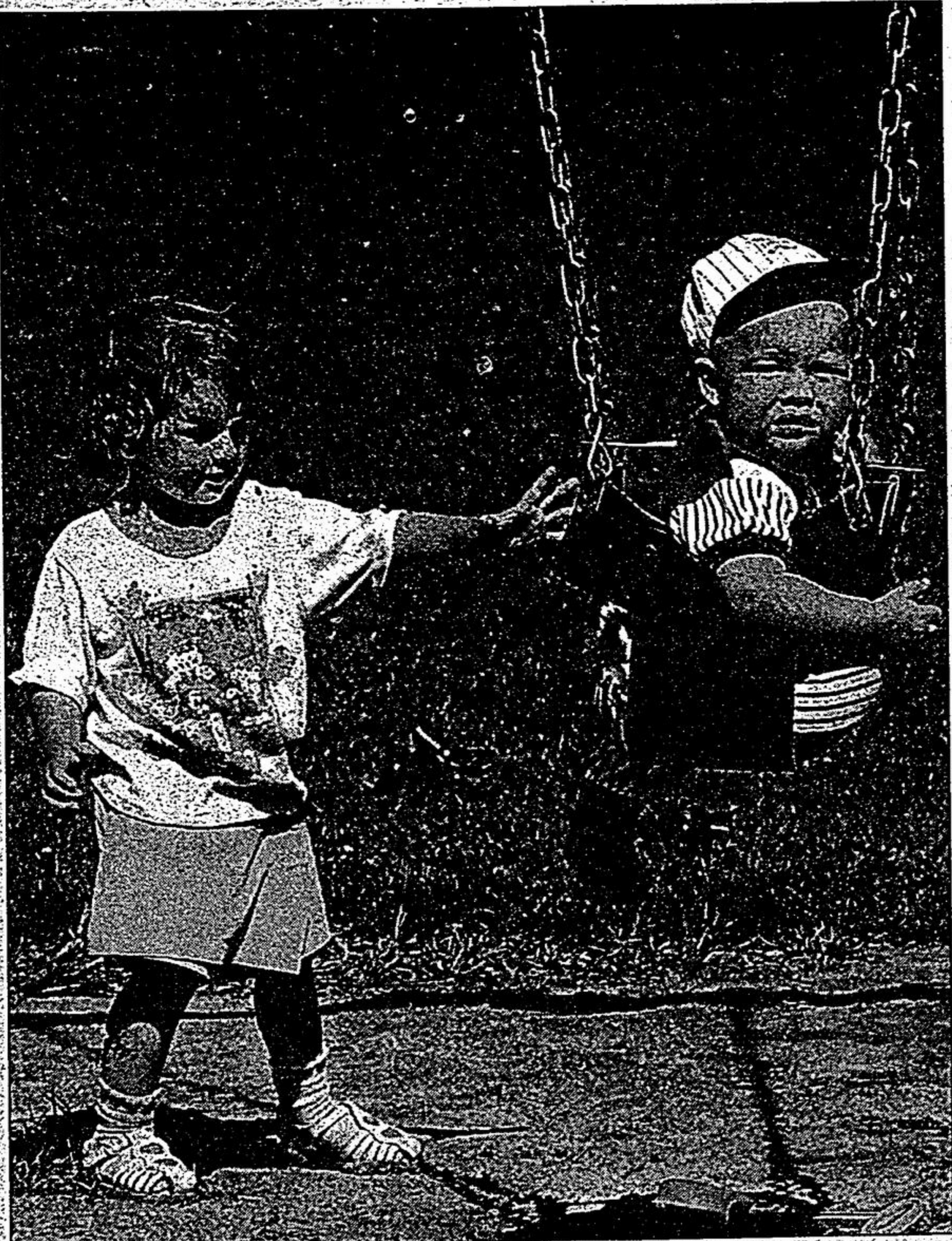
Hackson, indicating the majority of repairs include the removal of swing sets, elephant slides, steel climbers, and spring toys, said standards need to be revised often because of changing times and different play styles.

Newmarket regional councillor Diane Humeniuk said playground safety standards need to take into account the inquisitive nature of a child's play.

"They like adventure, like the risk factor, so we need to know what can we do to support their quest in the safest environment possible," said Humeniuk, who is involved in developing a fully accessible and integrative playground — like Aurora's millennium playground — in Newmarket. "Today, we have standards that enable us to develop and design safe play materials."

Even though today's playgrounds are safer than the ones she remembers as a mother with young children, Humeniuk hopes playgrounds will also become vandalism resistant in the future.

"(I hope that) not only will the playgrounds be safe, but more vandal proof," she said. "Unfortunately, that's a hard, hard combination. Sometimes putting measures in place compromises the design."



STAFF PHOTO/ROB ALARY

Samantha Barth pushes Reed Suhr on the swing at Lions Park in Newmarket. According to a Safe Kids Canada report, almost 65 per cent of all non-fatal injuries are caused by falls from monkey bars, slides or swings.

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