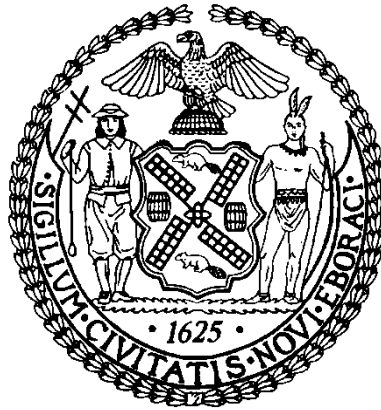


**CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE COMPTROLLER**

**John C. Liu
COMPTROLLER**

IT AUDIT & RESEARCH

**Tina Kim
Deputy Comptroller for Audit**



**Audit Report on the Effectiveness of the
Department of Parks and Recreation's
Parks Inspection Program**

Staten Island Playgrounds Report

7R12-099A

March 8, 2012

<http://comptroller.nyc.gov>



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE COMPTROLLER
1 CENTRE STREET
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10007-2341

John C. Liu
COMPTROLLER

March 8, 2012

To the Residents of the City of New York:

My office has audited the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) to determine whether the agency's Parks Inspection Program (PIP) is effectively monitoring the maintenance of the City's public playgrounds in Staten Island. We audit entities such as DPR as a means of ensuring that the City's public playgrounds are properly maintained and safe for children to use.

The Parks Inspection Program (PIP) is administered by the Operations and Management Planning (OMP) division. PIP monitors the quality of maintenance and general conditions of the City's public parks and recreational facilities.

This audit found that OMP officials inspect the playgrounds as required and forward the results of the inspections to DPR officials and Borough officials including the Borough Commissioner and Chief of Operations for review and correction of the unacceptable conditions. Subsequent to the initial inspection, PIP inspectors revisit playgrounds with unacceptable features that were believed to be hazardous to verify whether any corrective action had been taken. In addition, OMP follows up on playgrounds with hazardous conditions at biweekly meetings with the Borough Chief of Operations. OMP also maintains a database that ages all outstanding hazardous conditions and prepares internal reports reflecting the conditions of the playgrounds prior to inspections.

The results of the audit have been discussed with DPR officials, and their comments have been considered in preparing this report. Their complete written response is attached to this report.

If you have any questions concerning this report, please e-mail my audit bureau at audit@comptroller.nyc.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "John C. Liu".

John C. Liu

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*The City of New York
Office of the Comptroller
IT Audit and Research*

**Audit Report on the Effectiveness of the
Department of Parks and Recreation's
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Staten Island Playgrounds Report

7R12-099A

AUDIT REPORT IN BRIEF

The New York City Parks and Recreation Department (DPR) maintains a municipal park system of more than 29,000 acres, including more than 1,800 parks and over 1,000 playgrounds. One of DPR's principal missions is to keep the parks, playgrounds, and sitting areas of New York City clean and safe.

The Parks Inspection Program (PIP) is administered by the Operations and Management Planning (OMP) division. The program provides Parks and Recreation management, elected officials, and the public with a broad indicator of the condition of City parks. The program has been designed to reflect conditions encountered by the public when using Parks facilities.

PIP monitors the quality of maintenance and general conditions of the City's public parks and recreational facilities. According to OMP, all parks and playgrounds are randomly inspected in two-week cycles that cover 205 different sites. Every site in the City is inspected at least once a year; on average, most sites are inspected twice a year. At the end of each inspection cycle, the OMP officials forward the results of the inspections to DPR officials and Borough officials including the Borough Commissioner and Chief of Operations for review and correction of the hazardous conditions and quality of life issues¹ noted by the PIP inspectors. Subsequent to the initial inspection, PIP inspectors revisit some of the playgrounds with unacceptable conditions that needed immediate attention (IA) to verify whether any corrective actions had been taken.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

We found that the OMP officials inspect the playgrounds as required and forward the results of the inspections to DPR officials and Borough officials including the Borough

¹ Hazardous conditions are sharp, protruding bolts on benches, trip hazards on paved surfaces and sidewalks, or large dangling limbs. Quality of life issues are graffiti and non-bird feces. These hazardous conditions and quality of life issues are considered by PIP as needing "Immediate Attention" and required remediation by the Borough Chief of Operations.

Commissioner and Chief of Operations for review and correction of the unacceptable conditions. Subsequent to the initial inspection, PIP inspectors revisit playgrounds with unacceptable features that were believed to be hazardous to verify whether any corrective action had been taken. In addition, OMP follows up on playgrounds with hazardous conditions at biweekly meetings with the Borough Chief of Operations. OMP also maintains a database that ages all outstanding hazardous conditions and prepares internal reports reflecting the conditions of the playgrounds prior to inspections.

Audit Recommendation

The audit recommends that DPR management should:

1. Continue to monitor and follow up on conditions that are hazardous.

Agency Response

In their response, DPR officials agreed with our recommendation.

INTRODUCTION

Background

The New York City Parks and Recreation Department (DPR) maintains a municipal park system of more than 29,000 acres, including more than 1,800 parks and over 1,000 playgrounds. One of DPR's principal missions is to keep the parks, playgrounds, and sitting areas of New York City clean and safe.

The Parks Inspection Program (PIP) is administered by the Operations and Management Planning (OMP) division. This program provides Parks and Recreation management, elected officials, and the public with a broad indicator of the condition of City parks. The program has been designed to reflect conditions encountered by the public when using Parks facilities.

PIP monitors the quality of maintenance and general conditions of the City's public parks and recreational facilities. According to OMP, all parks and playgrounds are randomly inspected in two-week cycles that cover 205 different sites. Every site in the City is inspected at least once a year; on average, most sites are inspected twice a year. Site ratings are determined by the assessment of up to 17 features, which are grouped into one of three categories: cleanliness features, landscape features, and structural features. When a park/playground is inspected, each feature is evaluated and is deemed "acceptable" or "unacceptable" by the PIP inspectors.

At the end of each inspection cycle, OMP officials forward the results of the inspections to DPR officials and Borough officials including the Borough Commissioner and Chief of Operations for review and correction of the unacceptable conditions. Subsequent to the initial inspection, PIP inspectors revisit some of the playgrounds with hazardous conditions to verify whether any corrective action has been taken.

Objective

The objective of this audit is to determine whether the DPR's PIP is effectively monitoring the maintenance of the City's public playgrounds in Staten Island.

Scope and Methodology Statement

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. This audit was conducted in accordance with the audit responsibilities of the City Comptroller as set forth in Chapter 5, §93, of the New York City Charter.

The scope of this audit was from July 2011 through November 2011. Please refer to the Detailed Scope and Methodology at the end of this report for the specific procedures and tests that were conducted.

Discussion of Audit Results

The matters covered in this report were discussed with DPR officials during and at the conclusion of this audit. A preliminary draft report was sent to DPR officials and was discussed at an exit conference held on January 17, 2012. On January 24, 2012, we submitted a draft report to DPR officials with a request for comments. We received a written response from DPR on February 7, 2012. In their response, DPR officials agreed with our recommendation.

The full text of the DPR response is included as an addendum to this final report.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We found that OMP officials inspect the playgrounds as required and forward the results of the inspections to DPR officials and Borough officials including the Borough Commissioner and Chief of Operations for review and correction of the unacceptable conditions. Subsequent to the initial inspection, PIP inspectors revisit playgrounds with unacceptable features that were believed to be hazardous to verify whether any corrective action had been taken. In addition, OMP follows up on playgrounds with hazardous conditions at biweekly meetings with the Borough Chief of Operations. OMP also maintains a database that ages all outstanding hazardous conditions and prepares internal reports reflecting the conditions of the playgrounds prior to inspections

Monitoring Efforts by PIP

We conducted inspection of five playgrounds in Staten Island. Our assessment of the features for the playgrounds was based on the “Parks Inspection Program Standards” manual. A review of the most current PIP Site Inspection Reports for these five playgrounds indicated that our observations of the condition of the playgrounds generally matched the results from PIP’s inspectors. Further, we found that PIP’s playground inspections were generally well documented and inspection results were properly communicated to the appropriate authorities. For example, the hazardous conditions we found during our park inspections that were also noted by the PIP inspectors and referred to as IAs were conveyed to the Borough Chief of Operations and the First Deputy Commissioner of the Agency by OMP immediately following their inspection of the playground.

Additionally, at the conclusion of each inspection round, OMP presents a summary report to Borough officials including the Borough Commissioner and Chief of Operations at a biweekly meeting with the detailed evaluation of each failing site. The summary report also contains pictures of hazardous or unacceptable conditions observed. These hazardous conditions, such as sharp and protruding bolts on benches and trip hazards on paved surfaces and sidewalks, are noted by the PIP inspectors as needing “Immediate Attention.” There are two levels of “Immediate Attention” hazardous conditions, “Priority One”² and “Priority Two.”³ According to the PIP Standards manual, “All Immediate Attentions must be corrected by the end of the following round. This allows a typical 2-4 weeks for the resolution of the IA.” All Immediate Attentions noted by PIP during the inspection rounds are tracked by OMP and followed up on by PIP inspectors. During the re-inspection, the PIP inspectors locate the hazardous conditions and

² Priority One: The hazard presents the chance of a life-threatening or permanently debilitating injury or a single Priority One Immediate Attention will typically fail the overall condition rating (as well as the cleanliness rating if a cleanliness feature is flagged for Priority One Immediate Attention). A Priority One Immediate Attention will always fail the feature rating.

³ Priority Two: The hazard presents the chance of a slight to serious injury or is more critical in nature but in a remote location (in which case injury is less likely); graffiti that depicts hate speech or profanity; in playgrounds, small parks and Greenstreets, one Priority Two Immediate Attention will fail the feature rating. In large parks, two Priority Two Immediate Attentions for one feature is needed to fail the feature rating.

photograph the corrective actions that have been taken by the specified Borough Chief of Operations.

In addition, PIP inspectors will send an email on a daily basis to inform the Parks' First Deputy Commissioner and the Borough Chief of Operations of any playgrounds that have hazardous conditions during a routine inspection. Furthermore, PIP inspectors perform re-inspections of playgrounds with hazardous condition. These re-inspections are conducted on a random basis. The OMP has provided documentation to show that it tracks whether the hazardous conditions have been corrected. Before the biweekly management meetings, OMP runs the current hazardous aging report so that each Borough Chief of Operations knows how many outstanding hazardous conditions are in the borough.

Recommendation

The audit recommends that DPR management should:

1. Continue to monitor and follow up on conditions that are hazardous.

DPR Response: "Parks will continue to monitor and follow-up on all conditions that are hazardous. We currently have the Daily Immediate Attention (DIA) System that monitors the number of Immediate Attentions (IA) as well as the resolution of these hazards. In order to ensure proper resolution of an IA, only authorized staff members can resolve an IA with the required upload of pictures as documentation of corrected hazards. For quality assurance, we also have in place a follow-up review process that takes a sample of IAs resolved to *further* ensure hazards are properly corrected. In addition, IAs identified are emailed to operations managers the same day to alert them of any items identified. Lastly, there are biweekly reports and analyses on IAs that are reported to the Borough Chief of Operations."

DETAILED SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. This audit was conducted in accordance with the audit responsibilities of the City Comptroller as set forth in Chapter 5, §93, of the New York City Charter.

The scope period of this audit was July 2011 through November 2011. To meet our objectives, we obtained and reviewed the 2007 Edition of “Parks Inspection Program Standards” and the subsequent addendum.

To gain an understanding of the PIP operation, we interviewed DPR officials and reviewed PIP written policies and procedures. We documented the interviews through written narrative. In addition, we performed playground inspections with DPR inspectors to determine whether the inspectors follow the guidelines set forth in “Parks Inspection Program Standards.” We documented our observations through written narrative and compared the results of our observations with the PIP’s inspection report to affirm our understanding of the standards.

To determine if OMP monitored conditions in the playground, we requested and reviewed the daily IA inspection reports for the playgrounds that we inspected. This time frame included Winter 2010, Spring 2011, and Summer 2011 inspection cycles.

To determine if the PIP inspectors notified the Borough Chief of Operations of the hazardous conditions, we requested the OMP Reports from the biweekly meetings held from August 24, 2011, through October 27, 2011.

To determine whether the items identified as IA were continuously tracked by OMP, we examined the pertinent records, including OMP’s initial communication to the Borough chiefs regarding the IA items, Daily IA reports, and the IA status reports.

In addition, we requested the Spring/Summer Inspection Report and the Fall Round 1 Inspection Report which would indicate the round/cycle that the playground/park was inspected and the current status as of 2011.

To determine the number of playgrounds by boroughs for survey selection, we obtained the list of playgrounds from the DPR website. To conduct our testing, we randomly selected 5 of 56 playgrounds in Staten Island for inspection. Based on PIP inspection guidelines, we inspected these five randomly selected playgrounds and assessed the cleanliness, landscape, and structural features of these playgrounds.

To determine whether PIP is effectively monitoring the maintenance of the playgrounds, we compared the results of our inspections with DPR’s latest inspection reports. The condition of the playgrounds and the results of the comparative analysis are based on our observations at a

specific time. The results of our inspection of the playgrounds are unique and limited to the playgrounds selected in our sample. Hence, the results of our findings cannot be projected to all playgrounds in Staten Island.



City of New York
Parks & Recreation

The Arsenal
Central Park
New York, New York 10065

Adrian Benepe
Commissioner

February 7, 2012

Ms. Tina Kim
Deputy Comptroller for Audit
The City of New York
Office of the Comptroller
1 Centre Street, New York, NY 10007

Re: Audit Report on the Effectiveness of the Department of Parks and Recreation's Parks Inspection Program: the Bronx (7R12-055A); Brooklyn (7R12-096A); Manhattan (7R12-098A); Queens (7R12-097A); Staten Island (7R12-099A).

Dear Deputy Comptroller Kim:

Thank you for the opportunity for the New York Department of Parks & Recreation's ("Parks") to review and respond to the above referenced Draft Audit Reports ("Reports"). Overall, we believe the Reports were fair and balanced. In particular, we appreciate that the Reports incorporated comments from the exit conference. The Reports acknowledge that the Parks Inspection Program ("PIP") is well managed and fulfills its mandate of monitoring and evaluating the conditions of parks in the City of New York. We appreciate the Reports' recognition that "observations of the condition of the playgrounds generally matched the results from PIP's inspectors" and that "PIP's playground inspections were generally well documented and inspection results were properly communicated to the appropriate authorities."

The Reports raised some important issues regarding park conditions. However, Parks disagrees with the finding that "Playground Conditions were Not Corrected in a Timely Manner." For certain conditions, the auditors noted a "difference in days" between the original PIP Inspections and the auditors' inspection, which allowed for the following mitigating factors:

First, there were conditions noted in the original PIP inspection that were properly addressed, but then re-occurred by the time of the auditors' re-inspection. For example, a work order was completed to address a safety surface condition at Highland Park after a PIP inspection on 3/21/2011. Therefore, the auditors finding on July 2011 was a re-occurrence, and not the same condition noted in the PIP inspection.

Second, the "difference in days" suggests that conditions noted by the auditors and indicated in their inspection photos were left unaddressed for a long period of time. However, many of these conditions were not considered "Unacceptable" when they were noted in the original PIP inspection. For example, in the PIP inspection of East River Playground on 2/8/2011, the safety surface mats were approximately 10% deteriorated, which is not considered an "Unacceptable" condition as per the PIP Standard.

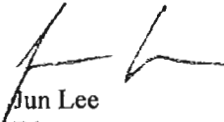
By the time the auditors inspected this site on July 2011, the safety surface mats had deteriorated further. However, the reader is led to believe that the "Unacceptable" condition as it was noted by the auditors existed for the entire five month period. Parks actively monitors all conditions found in parks and prioritizes repairs depending on the severity of these conditions. In addition, some conditions (non-immediate attentions) identified in PIP inspections can only be corrected through capital renovations that are not immediately available to the borough maintenance staff.

Indeed, all conditions requiring immediate attention that were identified in the Reports have been corrected. The remaining *non-immediate* attention conditions identified are currently being addressed.

The continued improvements and upgrading of the PIP have played a key role in the increase in the City's quality of life over the past twenty years.

We thank the Office of the Comptroller for your audit and recommendations. Our responses to the Reports' Recommendations are attached.

Sincerely,



Jun Lee
Director
Operations and Management Planning (OMP)

cc: Robert Garafola, Deputy Commissioner Management and Budget
David Stark, Assistant Commissioner for Budget
Frank D'Ercola, Deputy Chief Fiscal Officer
David Cerron, Chief Accountant
Vincent Liquori, Director, Financial Audit
Ernestine Rivers-Merritt, Audit Manager

Response to Recommendations for the Bronx (7R12-055A);

Response to Section Recommendation 1: Continue to monitor and to follow up on conditions that are hazardous. Parks will continue to monitor and follow-up on all conditions that are hazardous. We currently have the Daily Immediate Attention (DIA) System that monitors the number of Immediate Attentions (IA) as well as the resolution of these hazards. In order to ensure proper resolution of an IA, only authorized staff members can resolve an IA with the required upload of pictures as documentation of corrected hazards. For quality assurance, we also have in place a follow-up review process that takes a sample of IAs resolved to *further* ensure hazards are properly corrected. In addition, IAs identified are emailed to operations managers the same day to alert them of any items identified. Lastly, there are bi-weekly reports and analyses on IAs that are reported to the Borough Chief of Operations.

Response to Section Recommendation 2: Ensure that the Borough officials repair all outstanding items. Parks will make the best effort to address outstanding items, which is dependent on existing resources and materials as well as the availability of manpower. Furthermore, we will also prioritize repairs depending on the severity of these conditions.

Response to Section Recommendation 3: Ensure that all signs are posted appropriately. Parks will ensure all signs are properly posted at sites.

Response to Recommendations for Brooklyn (7R12-096A)

Response to Section Recommendation 1: Continue to monitor and to follow up on conditions that are hazardous. Parks will continue to monitor and follow-up on all conditions that are hazardous. We currently have the Daily Immediate Attention (DIA) System that monitors the number of Immediate Attentions (IA) as well as the resolution of these hazards. In order to ensure proper resolution of an IA, only authorized staff members can resolve an IA with the required upload of pictures as documentation of corrected hazards. For quality assurance, we also have in place a follow-up review process that takes a sample of IAs resolved to *further* ensure hazards are properly corrected. In addition, IAs identified are emailed to operations managers the same day to alert them of any items identified. Lastly, there are bi-weekly reports and analyses on IAs that are reported to the Borough Chief of Operations.

Response to Section Recommendation 2: Ensure that the Borough officials repair all outstanding items. Parks will make the best effort to address outstanding items, which is dependent on existing resources and materials as well as the availability of manpower. Furthermore, we will also prioritize repairs depending on the severity of these conditions.

Response to Recommendations for Manhattan (7R12-098A)

Response to Section Recommendation 1: Continue to monitor and to follow up on conditions that are hazardous. Parks will continue to monitor and follow-up on all conditions that are hazardous. We currently have the Daily Immediate Attention (DIA) System that monitors the number of Immediate Attentions (IA) as well as the resolution of these hazards. In order to ensure proper resolution of an IA, only authorized staff members can resolve an IA with the required upload of pictures as documentation of corrected hazards. For quality assurance, we also have in place a follow-up review process that takes a sample of IAs resolved to *further* ensure hazards are properly corrected. In addition, IAs identified are emailed to operations managers the same day to alert them of any items identified. Lastly, there are bi-weekly reports and analyses on IAs that are reported to the Borough Chief of Operations.

Response to Section Recommendation 2: Ensure that the Borough officials repair all outstanding items. Parks will make the best effort to address outstanding items, which is dependent on existing resources and materials as well as the availability of manpower. Furthermore, we will also prioritize repairs depending on severity of these conditions.

Response to Section Recommendation 3: Enforce all posted regulations.
Parks will enforce all posted regulations

Response to Recommendations for Queens (7R12-097A)

Response to Section Recommendation 1: Continue to monitor and to follow up on conditions that are hazardous. Parks will continue to monitor and follow-up on all conditions that are hazardous. We currently have the Daily Immediate Attention (DIA) System that monitors the number of Immediate Attentions (IA) as well as the resolution of these hazards. In order to ensure proper resolution of an IA, only authorized staff members can resolve an IA with the required upload of pictures as documentation of corrected hazards. For quality assurance, we also have in place a follow-up review process that takes a sample of IAs resolved to *further* ensure hazards are properly corrected. In addition, IAs identified are emailed to operations managers the same day to alert them of any items identified. Lastly, there are bi-weekly reports and analyses on IAs that are reported to the Borough Chief of Operations.

Response to Section Recommendation 2: Ensure that the Borough officials repair all outstanding items. Parks will make the best effort to address outstanding items, which is dependent on existing resources and materials as well as the availability of manpower. Furthermore, we will also prioritize repairs depending on the severity of these conditions.

Response to Recommendation for Staten Island (7R12-099A)

Response to Section Recommendation 1: Continue to monitor and to follow up on conditions that are hazardous. Parks will continue to monitor and follow-up on all conditions that are hazardous. We currently have the Daily Immediate Attention (DIA) System that monitors the number of Immediate Attentions (IA) as well as the resolution of these hazards. In order to ensure proper resolution of an IA, only authorized staff members can resolve an IA with the required upload of pictures as documentation of corrected hazards. For quality assurance, we also have in place a follow-up review process that takes a sample of IAs resolved to *further* ensure hazards are properly corrected. In addition, IAs identified are emailed to operations managers the same day to alert them of any items identified. Lastly, there are bi-weekly reports and analyses on IAs that are reported to the Borough Chief of Operations.