

Special Report

Setting the Standard for Aquatic Play Structures and Waterplay

ProSlide's Andreas Tanzer discusses the new ASTM standard for aquatic attractions
by Marion Hixon

EARLIER THIS FALL, ASTM International introduced standard ASTM F2461—Standard Practice for Manufacture, Construction, Operation, and Maintenance of Aquatic Play Equipment—an answer to questions about best practices for this specific segment of the industry. Andreas Tanzer, sub-chair of the ASTM Subcommittee F24.70 on Water-Related Amusement Rides and Devices, talked to FUNWORLD about how this standard is just the foundation for others regarding waterplay attractions, and how manufacturers and suppliers have come together in the interest of safety.



Andreas Tanzer

ASTM/PROSLIDE TECHNOLOGY

as well as the people creating the equipment—the innovators.

What topics are included in the standard?

One of the first things we incorporated was how the standard pertained to the current specifications and code requirements in the industry for structures and existing dry playground standards. Other new laws, such as the Virginia Graeme Baker Act, specifically addressed concerns if there's standing water present along with suction drains. If you're going to follow through with the standard, you must comply with the ASME (American Society of Mechanical Engineers; www.asme.org) standard on drains (A1-

12-19-8). Of course, it depends on your attraction—if you don't have standing water (e.g., a wet deck), drain entrapment isn't possible, and the previous ASME standard won't apply to the attraction.

The standard covers subjects like surface finishes and how younger children interact with the attraction so entrapment can be avoided. The materials used to construct the attractions are also covered. And we're in the process of starting to define durability and levels of quality to help determine the shelf life of equipment.

The standard was created so everyone knows what attractions are deemed as safe. They can ask, "Does mine meet the standard?" when they're shopping, and they can look for something that meets and exceeds the standard. Similarly, manufacturers can tell their clients they're ASTM compliant and show their level of quality.

How did the new ASTM F2461 standard come about?

As aquatic play structures were gaining more and more popularity, inspectors and park owners asked us about best practices for standardized inspections and procedures. These structures are unique in that they include water features, so a lot of the demand came from the industry asking about inspections.

To which attractions and facilities does the standard apply? It seems like a one-stop shop for aquatic attraction guidelines.

It applies to exactly what's in the industry right now—there are other standards for recreation facilities, but this specifically outlines the design and the engineering components of the structure itself. It's a general aquatic play standard, so it can apply to any facility (zoo, museum, theme park, family entertainment center, etc.) in the amusement industry that has an attraction with water being sprayed on it or shooting out from it. As soon as your structure has a platform, it's more than two feet off the ground, and is in a wet play area, the standard applies to you.

It's a foundation for everything to come. It took more than three years to develop, and from here we'll build guidelines that will continue to allow this standard to grow. A lot of this has been driven by the people in the industry,

Will facilities need to change their current attractions?

ASTM F2461 was created with current water structures in mind, so you probably won't need to retrofit your attractions. That said, if the state says you need to comply with the standard and you aren't already, there are very minor changes a manufacturer may have to do to comply.

FYI: When, Where, and How Standards Are Developed

ASTM standards are based on demand from the industry—both clients and manufacturers—so they're constantly in development. Tanzer says the type of emerging standard is directly proportional to how fast that area of the industry is growing. "If there's a lot of involvement, the standard evolves quickly," he says.

ASTM's standards are spreading globally. Countries like Canada are recognizing and adopting the F-24 standards and guidelines through the diligent efforts of Canadian ASTM members.

"This October will be the final vote to accept the Canadian version of the F-24 set of Standards by the F24.80 Subcommittee on Harmonization," Tanzer says. "This will create a new 'Standard Practice for Design, Manufacture, Operation, Maintenance, and Inspection of Amusement Rides and Devices, in Canada.' The individual province acceptance will be the last step, which should move quickly." This process and similar efforts are now being recognized by other countries worldwide as the ASTM standards become recognized and accepted internationally.

It was nice having all the major manufacturers involved [companies like Empex Water Toys, SCS Interactive, White-Water, Funtraptions, Koala, Empex, and Waterplay, among others]. They provided a deep knowledge base of the industry; while they're competitors, the meetings were truly an open, constructive forum. Current owners of aquatic play structures were also an integral part of the process as they lent their real-world experience to the development of this standard. The process was unique, and there is a high level of professionalism when safety is discussed.

What other standard developments should operators be on the lookout for in the coming year?

There's going to be a lot of future work concerning the ASTM (24-70). We're also looking at issues regarding protection systems and restraints. As new products are being developed, new standards need to follow at the same time. A lot of companies are constantly developing new products with ASTM standards in mind, but when you're innovative, you always fall somewhat outside the norm. We are also looking into a drain-grate standard as it applies to amusement devices, as well as water spray and the impact of sprays on the body and sculpted foam in a wet environment. ■

Andreas Tanzer is director of innovations, research, and standards at ProSlide Technology Inc. For more information on F2461 and other standards in the attractions industry, visit www.astm.org.

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