

# Facility and Recreation Trend Report

## Splash Pads/Parks

Winter 2017



### Trend/Background

Splash pools/parks evolved when children took relief from a forced open fire hydrant on a scorching summer afternoon. The cool spray provided much relief from the heat, but what we know now are the benefits far exceed just a cooling off.

For more than 25 years Splash pools/parks have been an upward innovative trend with variations all over the world. Splash pads respect water conservation, prevent drowning, lower incidents of injury, are moderately inexpensive compared to traditional swimming pools and moreover, loved by millions of people, not just children. But like many trends, the rush to create new

splash pads or parks have left behind a lag in some water safety aspects and regulations.

The first forms of Splash pools/parks emerged when municipalities started adding “rain drop mushrooms” to pre-existing wading pools. Then splashpads became popular when transforming old play areas such as deteriorating playgrounds or unused wading pools into bright, attractive and useful gathering places for all ages. The conclusion of many communities across North America is that splash play offers great advantages transforming public spaces into healthy and active environment.

## Benefits

- The use of splash pads is a great way to stay active when summer days are hot and the public is not as active. The next generation of Splash pools/parks also fosters physical development, providing sensory stimulation through tactile interactions with water sprays, streams and jets. Splash play also encourages the development of gross motor movement through jumping, running and dodging.
- Splash pads are accessible to absolutely everyone, including the elderly and the disabled.
- Successful splashpads now include intentionally designed features to cultivate cognitive skills like planning, imaginative thinking, focus, problem-solving and self-control as children interact with moving water. These neurological building blocks shape and carry children through life.
- Splash play can also foster social development as splash parks are a popular meeting place, giving all users the chance to interact with each in this common play area.

## Safety

- While the trend for Splash pads continues to grow, some safety regulations have lagged. Ontario has made some strides in this area with some safety standards. Water born illnesses are a concern, especially if splash parks are not maintained regularly.
- Installers and designers will recommend a maintenance budget be included within the overall budget when planning a splash area.  
For more safety information visit:  
[http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/oph\\_standards/docs/recreational\\_water.pdf](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/oph_standards/docs/recreational_water.pdf)



## Design Considerations

Some Splash pools/parks operate more like a swimming pool, with chlorinated water (as well as UV and other sanitizing agents in some cases) stored in a tank below the play surface and recirculated through the fixtures. In other cases, potable water from the city's system flows through the spray park once and is then sent to the municipal sewer system or recycled another way.

The option you choose may depend on your budget, available staff resources, community's commitment to green living and local health and building code.

Consider the following:

### Recirculating (chlorinated) systems:

Repurposing of water enables kids to splash and play without using excessive resources. A typical recirculation system, where water is used, recaptured, treated and returned, will use a small amount of water during a season

1. Cost more to install and require more space for equipment.
2. Have similar maintenance requirements as a swimming pool in terms of staff, chemicals, pumps and equipment.

3. Allow for a larger volume of water to play with.
4. May be required by your health & building code (particularly if a spray park is categorized the same way as a swimming pool).

### Flow-through systems:

1. Cost less to install.
2. Are particularly popular in parts of the country where water is inexpensive.
3. Can be engineered to capture and reuse runoff water for plants or to flush toilets in nearby buildings.
4. Allow for faster cleanup in the case of a contamination incident because there's no tank to be drained.
5. Require less maintenance staff, but should still be monitored for health and safety reasons.



## Cost

- The cost to design, construct and install can vary from approximately \$100K upwards to a \$1M based on what the park entails and its targeted sector.
- Generally, a comparison of construction costs indicate the cost of building a splash park is around \$250 per sq. ft. as opposed to a similar pool installation costing \$300 per sq. ft.
- More locally, the town of New Minas paid \$150K for a basic set-up in 2013/14. Berwick constructed a splash park including hard and soft landscaping for \$310K.
- Communities can get started for approximately \$100K with 3-4 fixtures on a circular 50-60' pad.



## Is a Splash Park right for your community?

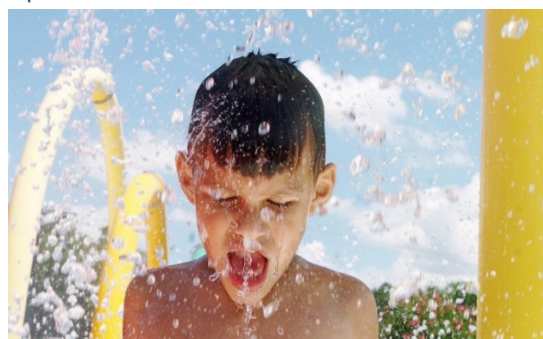
- Is this an option for your existing facility? Probably the greatest increase in splashpad and spray park growth is in existing aquatic recreational facilities that see the value of its ability to draw in the crowds while virtually negating the need for additional staffing.
- Are you replacing a pool or building a new one? For aging community pools needing an infusion of new excitement - splashpads have been a great solution
- Trying to revitalize your recreational spaces? Because splashpads are known to draw a crowd, their location can also help to transform an underperforming recreational area into a hub of social activity

## Recommendations

- Any group considering building a splashpad should really take the time necessary to analyse location - perform a site/location matrix prioritizing preferred sites to ensure a broad range of usage.
- Match the right amenities to the space – design plan needs to ask such questions as where the park will be located, what demographic will be using it, whether there will be bicycle racks needed, where shade should be provided, how to provide beverages or drinking water, if baby-changing stations or bathrooms are needed, and if concessions are desired, etc.
- The use of 3-D models can be particularly helpful in formulating the layout possibilities for projects. 3-D models not only help visualize the splash park but help see how the splash park will function and interact with surrounding infrastructure and environment.
- Other considerations should also include designing elements both for those who want to get wet as well as those who don't -

soft mists for those less willing to get soaked and then full dumps for those excited about the anticipation of surprise and thrills.

- Any system should include a push-button “on” switch and perhaps a timer so water is flowing only when patrons are there to enjoy it.
- Recirculation or Repurposing water—using the runoff water for your soccer fields or plants enables larger usage of water resources which you were going to use anyway. If you're going to water that field, why not have the families in your community play with the water first.
- Always important to factor in maintenance costs when drafting the budget for your Splash Park.



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