



## Spotlight on Recreation: A Report Card on Parks Project Executive Summary

July 30, 2008

**About the study:** New Yorkers for Parks' *Spotlight on Recreation* is a new report that examines the maintenance conditions of three outdoor recreation features: athletic fields, courts, and playgrounds in a random selection of neighborhood parks (1-20 acres). Visiting a total of 49 parks in all five boroughs, surveyors inspected each feature on three separate occasions, once in June, July, and August 2007. We used the same survey instrument developed in 2002 to conduct park inspections for *The Report Card on Parks*. This structure allows us to measure the performance of these specific features over the course of the summer.

### Overall Findings:

- Scores for the three features – athletic fields, courts, and playgrounds – remained steady over the three-month survey period;
- Athletic fields performed particularly poorly, averaging 51% (F);
- Courts averaged 71% (C-), improving slightly by the end of the summer;
- Playgrounds were the highest scoring of the three features, receiving an average score of 79% (C +) for the summer;
- All three features performed slightly worse than the previous summer, with athletic fields slipping the most, from 57% in 2006 to 51% in 2007. Playgrounds declined from 84% in 2006 to 79% in 2007, and courts slipped from 72% last year to 71% this year;
- Many sites were impacted by sloppy maintenance repair work, such as mismatched materials and unfinished repairs;
- Graffiti was generally addressed in a timely manner, particularly for athletic fields and courts.

Feature	Summer Average	June	July	August
Athletic fields	<b>51% (F)</b>	50%	51%	52%
Courts	<b>71% (C-)</b>	69%	72%	71%
Playgrounds	<b>79% (C+)</b>	81%	78%	79%

### Athletic fields

#### Successes:

- Infields were evenly graded and free of puddles
- Benches were generally in good condition, with 87% rated acceptable

#### Challenges:

- Athletic fields were locked to the public without explanation (26% of parks surveyed had at least one athletic field locked over the summer)
- Broken glass and litter were found on 15% and 34% of athletic fields, respectively

## **Courts**

### Successes:

- Very little broken glass was found on courts (93% rated “acceptable”)

### Challenges:

- Court surfaces were impacted by cracks and holes (found on 34% of courts)
- Nearly half of courts (tennis, basketball and volleyball) were missing nets

## **Playgrounds**

### Successes:

- Playgrounds were 99% free of broken glass

### Challenges:

- One-quarter of surveyed playgrounds were affected by litter
- Although safety surfacing scored well, the quality of surfacing declined as the summer progressed, from 94% acceptable in June to 85% acceptable in August

## **Recommendations**

1. Keep as many athletic fields as possible unlocked, and publicize the reasons for locking particular fields.
2. Implement a maintenance strategy for timely repairs to court surfaces and replacement of torn and missing nets, particularly on tennis courts, similar to that which is used for addressing graffiti and playground maintenance.
3. Ensure that dedicated playground staff continues to be available to address and report maintenance needs, especially during challenging fiscal periods.
4. Develop a maintenance strategy to address excessive broken glass on athletic fields, and examine the feasibility of prohibiting glass bottles and containers on the fields, as is done for beaches.

**About The Report Card on Parks:** New Yorkers for Parks’ award-winning *Report Card on Parks* was designed in 2002 to measure the maintenance and conditions of more than 100 neighborhood parks (1-20 acres) in all five boroughs. Since 2005, the *Report Card on Parks* project has been expanded to examine specific park features such as athletic fields and adapted to measure the performance of other park properties such as beaches. Every summer New Yorkers for Parks collects quantitative performance data on park properties across the city.