



Playtime Protection

By Richie Ward

Shade systems help keep children safe at Patrick Air Force Base, Florida

The children who spend time at Patrick Air Force Base in Brevard County, Florida, are now safer at play thanks to an installation-wide plan to control the dangerous effects of the sun's ultraviolet rays on its youth programs and child development centers. At the center of the plan is incorporating sun shades at all of the base's play areas. This is particularly significant for Patrick Air Force Base when you consider the wide range of service members and their families who access and use the base's resources.

Patrick Air Force Base is an Air Force Space Command (AFSPC) base home to the 45th Space Wing whose officers and airmen manage all launch activity at the Cape Canaveral Air Force Station. This launch activity includes satellites for other military services, the National Reconnaissance Office, and the National Security Agency.



This shade system covering a playground at the Patrick Air Force Base Child Development Center helps keep equipment cool despite the hot Florida sun.

The 45th Force Support Squadron also is stationed at Patrick Air Force Base. The Support Squadron handles the morale, welfare, and recreation (MWR) of the base by providing support services to the uniformed and civilian members of the Department of Defense and US Air Force. A portion of those services includes supporting a Child Development Center that takes care of more than 175 children, ranging in age from six weeks to five years old.

Peak concerns

In determining the need for shade protection, Patrick AFB personnel only had to consider the effects of the sun's harmful UV rays, especially between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.—the hottest time of the day and when many children are outside. And with the extensive array of playground equipment and play structures for youth activities on the base, it became apparent

that children could benefit the most from the reduced temperatures shade structures provide.

Patrick AFB now features several shade structures over its playgrounds and play areas. Before shade protection was added, children often would find some playground equipment too hot to play on during the peak hours of the day. A unique benefit of shade protection is the ability to reduce temperatures in the shaded area, thereby allowing children to play safely on the equipment at all hours.

Safer play

Research estimates that one in five Americans will develop skin cancer in his or her lifetime, with that number growing rapidly among the younger population. One serious burn can increase the risk of developing skin

cancer by as much as 50 percent. Shade systems provide protection by blocking 99 percent of the sun's harmful UV rays. These systems also lower the temperature by 15 to 20 degrees in the shaded area, providing a more comfortable play area for children.

Members of the Youth Services and Child Development Center on Patrick AFB say the shade systems allow children to use play areas more than they normally would, particularly during the mid-day hours. Now the young people can more comfortably and safely enjoy these amenities on Patrick AFB—and caregivers and parents can feel good about their playtime. ■

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