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## [From Police Shootings to Playground Injuries, Lawsuits Drain Cities' Budgets.](#)

***Municipalities spend more than a billion dollars a year on settlements and claims from citizens. Some are trying hard to rein in those costs.***

There's a big silver dome in the corner of Union Square Park in New York City. Kids love to scramble up the six-foot-high stainless steel structure, called the Mountain, and then slide back down. The only problem is, the thing gets hot in the sun. Really hot. One afternoon in 2012, the metal surface was so warm that a young girl climbing on it suffered severe burns to her hand from the scorching hot steel. Her father filed a claim against the city, which was later settled for \$24,500. (The city has since added a shade structure to shield the dome from the sun.) But that wasn't the only injury in Union Square Park that year. City records show three other families also filed claims in 2012 holding the government liable for injuries on the playground — one of the highest tallies in the city's parks system.

The next year, a falling tree struck a man in the park, resulting in a \$15,000 payout from the city. A few months after that, a police tow truck allegedly hit a teenage boy crossing an intersection near the north end of the park, prompting another filing.

Claims and lawsuits are an everyday occurrence in the Big Apple, where about 9,500 cases were filed against the city last fiscal year. In all, New York paid out \$720 million in judgments and claims in fiscal 2016, which amounts to about \$84 per resident. That's only about 1 percent of the city's total expenditures, but it represents much-needed funding that could be directed elsewhere. For instance, it's more than the combined budgets of the Parks and Recreation Department and the Department of Buildings.

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