

NAFLIC

National Association For Leisure Industry Certification

Standards & Related Documents Committee

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220. Disneyland Roger Rabbit Accident

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There was an accident on Disneyland's "Roger Rabbit" Car Toon Spin ride in September 2000 in which a 4 year old boy sustained a serious brain injury and will be permanently disabled. The child, who was riding next to his mother at the time of the accident, fell out of his car, was struck by a trailing car, and got pinned underneath it. We have recently heard that the Walt Disney Company has reached an out of court settlement with the boy's family, estimated in the press as being worth millions of dollars.

We have not seen full details of the investigation and cannot form a view as to the causes of the accident, although it was apparently not the result of a mechanical malfunction or breakage. Despite the lack of detailed information, we were prompted to review known issues associated with some of the factual descriptions appearing in the press reports.

Firstly, and bearing in mind that the 4 year old was accompanied by his mother in the Disneyland case, we sometimes hear of incidents and accidents affecting unaccompanied children of 4, 3 or even 2 years old. Some children in this age range may become frightened, even on very slow moving kiddie rides. Experienced operators of juvenile rides will tell you that, if they can, children under 5 may sometimes try to get off a ride whilst it is in motion, unaware of the associated risks. This passenger maturity issue needs to be taken into account during the design risk assessment if it is intended that the ride is to be used unaccompanied by such age groups.

Secondly, on adult rides used by young children we recall an accident, affecting a child riding with his mother, which followed from him becoming agitated and disorientated. The ride had come to a halt but, unfortunately, the cars had openings on both sides even though there was only a loading / unloading platform on one side. When the lap bar was released the boy stepped out of the wrong side of the car and broke a leg. The location of openings / doors is clearly a matter for risk assessment at the design stage.

Thirdly, there are sometimes conditions on the relative locations of adults and children in a car. Classic examples are rides like Twists and Superbobs in which there is a significant (centrifugal) transverse force acting predominantly in one direction. The seating arrangements need to avoid children being crushed against elements of the containment by their parent being forced against them. When such loading conditions are imposed, the training of

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(particularly casual or temporary) ride attendants to enforce the requirement is clearly important.

Last, we mention the supervision of the way in which very young children ride when accompanied on appropriate rides. The accompanying adult may provide reassurance to a frightened child. However, it is not unknown to see an adult climb into a ride, seat the child on their knee, and close the lap bar on to the child. This will rarely be sensible in that lap bars will not normally be constructed to limit the pressure on the child if the adult's mass is forced forward. Staff training is again relevant.