

Golf carts are becoming more popular with organizations that have large grounds, parking lots or campuses. They are affordable, efficient and simple to drive. They have a variety of uses; from transporting church members to and from parking areas, to staff utilizing them for building and grounds maintenance tasks. However, golf carts can have hidden costs. Statistics show an alarming increase in injuries every year.

Injury Statistics

- ❑ In an analysis conducted by the National Electronic Injury Surveillance System (NEISS) in 2007, over 147,000 golf cart injuries occurred in the United States from 1990 to 2006.
- ❑ The United States Consumer Products Safety Commission (CPSC) reported 15,000 golf cart-related injuries occur each year and are steadily rising every year.
- ❑ According to the American Journal of Preventative Medicine, children under the age of 16 represent one-third of all golf cart-related injuries.

Claim Example

While waiting outside the church building after church services, a seven year old girl was run over by a golf cart. This occurred because another girl was sitting in the church owned golf cart and accidentally hit the gas pedal. The golf cart had to be lifted off the injured girl, and she sustained numerous cuts, bruises and suffered a concussion. After further investigation, it was noted that someone had left the keys in the golf cart ignition in the “on” position.

Accident Prevention

Golf carts have a high center of gravity and are susceptible to rollovers, especially when turning. Additionally, the majority of golf carts are not equipped with seat belts. To prevent accidents like the example above, adhere to the following safety guidelines.

Safety Guidelines

- ❑ Operators should possess a valid driver’s license, even though it may not be a requirement in your specific state in order to operate a golf cart. Also, operators should have a clean driving record and be at least 18 years old.
- ❑ The golf cart should operate at a speed equivalent to a well-paced walk but no faster than 15 miles per hour. Be especially cautious and slow down when driving on wet, snow and ice covered surfaces. Drive only as fast as conditions warrant.
- ❑ All passengers in the golf cart should keep hands, arms, legs and feet within the confines of the cart when it is in motion. Passengers should not be allowed to enter or exit the golf cart until it has come to a complete stop and the driver informs them that it is safe to enter/exit.

- Transporting children is dangerous since they may not be able to hold on effectively. If children are allowed on the golf cart, they should not be transported without the presence of an adult. If a parent is helping a child hold on, he/she needs to have one hand free to hold on to the cart.
- Do not transport more passengers than the golf cart is designed to carry.
- Operation of the golf cart should be confined to the campus only and not on city streets. Try to avoid sidewalks and uneven terrain. Avoid sharp turns as golf carts do not have a good center of gravity and can overturn easily.
- Always yield to pedestrians and vehicles.
- Don't allow distractions while driving. This would include use of cell phones or other communication devices, eating or drinking.
- Follow the golf cart manufacturer's safety guidelines. If you cannot locate the manual, contact your local golf course or go online and contact the manufacturer.
- Always drive with the lights on. This will allow for increased visibility to pedestrians and vehicles, and will properly illuminate the path of travel during low light conditions. If the golf cart is not equipped with headlights, they are to be used during daylight hours only and not driven at night.
- Never park golf carts where they will block fire lanes, access to fire hydrants, pedestrian walkways, exits or disabled parking.
- When the golf cart is not in use, the golf cart control lever should be placed in the "Neutral" position, emergency brake engaged and the keys should be removed.
- Always lock and secure the golf cart when it is not being used.

Driver Training

- All golf cart drivers should be trained and certified prior to operating.
- Training includes:
 - Center of gravity and handling characteristics;
 - Proper procedures for safety and operation; and
 - Maintenance per manufacturer's recommendations.
- All training should be documented and kept on file for each driver.
- Any accident or damage to the golf cart should be reported immediately.

Inspection/Maintenance

- Inspect the golf cart prior to use. Items to check include tire inflation, cuts or punctures on tires, steering, forward and reverse gears, brakes and lights.
- If the golf cart is in need of repair or maintenance, the unit should be taken out of service until necessary repairs can be completed.
- Perform scheduled preventative maintenance according to the manufacturer's recommendations.

Recharging of Batteries

- Only approved battery chargers should be used to recharge the golf cart batteries. These are designed to shut off automatically when the batteries are fully charged.
- Batteries generate explosive hydrogen gas. Recharging should be done in a well ventilated area away from any open flames or sparks. Smoking should not be allowed in the recharging area and “No Smoking” signs should be posted.
- Make sure the ignition switch on the golf cart is in the “OFF” position before recharging.
- Sparks may be created when attaching or removing the battery charger clamps to the battery. The charger should be off before clamps are attached or removed from the battery terminals.
- Batteries contain corrosive sulfuric acid that can burn the skin and ruin clothing. Personal protective equipment including safety glasses and a full face shield should be provided and worn whenever recharging batteries.
- Baking soda should be applied to any acid spills before cleaning up the area.
- Skin should be washed thoroughly with cold water if exposed to battery acid.
- Disconnect all battery charger cables from the golf cart before using.

By following the safety practices above, you are ensuring the safety of staff, volunteers and the general public. By preventing or reducing the chances of injury and property damage that may result from the use of golf carts, your organization can avoid a serious situation.