



## Checklists and Reminders for Amusement Park and Carnival Openings



It's time for amusement parks and carnivals to prepare for fun. Unfortunately, it also means that owners and operators of amusement parks and carnivals need to be prepared to manage and minimize risks.

Today's amusement parks and carnivals are vastly different than the amusement industry of the 20th century. The rides offer more variety and more thrills, and technology has changed the way amusement parks and carnivals run.

We know that creating a safe, clean, and memorable guest experience remains a top priority. Amusement park and carnival owners and operators need to prepare for anything.

## **Amusement Rides Are Regulated Through Voluntary Standards, Manufacturer Standards, and by Federal, State, and Local Laws**

Amusement ride safety is regulated through a patchwork of voluntary standards, manufacturer standards, and by federal, state, and local laws.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (USPSC) is authorized to investigate accidents and works with manufacturers to correct defects or hazards to specific machinery, but only for mobile rides and devices. Rides operated at amusement parks and water parks are exempt from federal safety oversight.

State and local governments establish safety guidelines and inspection programs for amusement rides that operate within their jurisdictions.



Since federal safety officials are not authorized to address safety concerns on permanent park rides, each state and local government is responsible for safety oversight of amusement rides within its jurisdiction. This includes data collection and trend analysis, investigation of serious accidents, and negotiating mitigation of manufacturing defects.

Amusement parks and carnivals must also comply with ride manufacturer requirements. As you prepare for the amusement park and carnival season, train your staff on the capacity standards for every ride and attraction. Even the best design and operations team cannot push an attraction beyond its limits. Know the capacity standards, and stick to them.

## **Amusement Park and Carnival Owners and Operators Must Remain Vigilant to Minimize Risk of Injury**

In 2016, emergency rooms saw an estimated 30,000 injuries linked to amusement parks.

Compared to the number of people who go to amusement parks and carnivals every year, the number of injuries is small. But the potential for serious injuries remains, and the potential for liability exposure that comes with operating an amusement park or carnival means that owners and operators need to stay vigilant in minimizing the risk of injuries to their guests.



## Develop a Plan or Reevaluate Existing Plans

Amusement parks and carnivals should have plans in place for any incident, big or small, that affects staff or guests.

If a plan already exists, review the policy frequently to see what is working, and what could be improved. If you do not have a plan in place, consider working with an emergency planning consultant. The beginning of a new season is also a good time to update your emergency plan.

When formulating or reevaluating a plan, consider:

- Are you prepared for an active shooter incident?
- Are you prepared for a fire incident?

For every potential risk, consider the following:

- Is the risk of exposure necessary to your operations? If not, consider taking steps to eliminate it from your park's operations.
- Can you train and educate staff to recognize the potential risk and give them the skills to reduce the risk in the event of an occurrence? If so, put together a strategy on how to train each employee on their role in mitigating risk.
- Can things like a physical barrier, increased security, or surveillance be used to reduce the risk or act as a deterrent? If so, implement them into your overall risk management strategy.
- Is the risk reduced through the integration and cooperation of civil authorities? If so, hold a meeting with the authorities and share your plan and insights with them.



Determine how your staff will handle the risks you have identified, and work to build a culture that values and encourages safety. The best owners and operators infuse safety throughout their culture. Design specific roles for your staff and develop a system to monitor and improve compliance. A good plan should include specific, measurable objectives.

If you have an employee handbook, review it at the start of the season to verify that everything is up-to-date and that procedures are clear.

## Invest in Your Staff

Great staff and experienced operations personnel will see problems before they happen and take steps to prevent them.

Hiring great teams and staff will increase productivity and save your park or carnival millions of dollars in downtime, repair costs, and legal expenses, as well as ill-will and negative publicity from guests.

To help find and retain good staff:

- Don't underpay them.
- Promote from within and give team members something to strive for.
- Rotate staff to improve cross-training, morale, and operational efficiency.
- Train them diligently.

Ride operators should be trained to operate rides safely and should know all basic safety rules.

All staff should know the amusement park or carnival rules.

Conduct training and update training material to ensure that each team member is up-to-date on all certifications.



## Build a Better Inspection Program

Inspections are a critical part of a risk management program. Consider the following suggestions to create and implement a successful inspection program:

- Perform daily inspections of all rides, attractions, and common areas of the facility. Checklists should be completed daily and should include details on any discrepancy.
- Inspections of rides and attractions should include, at a minimum, the exact points to be inspected as provided by the manufacturer of each ride or attraction.
- Maintenance personnel should be trained, and the training documented before allowing individuals to perform unsupervised inspections.
- Someone other than the regular maintenance personnel should perform “spot check” inspections of each ride or attraction. This allows for internal checks and balances.
- Rotate the personnel who perform ride and attraction inspections. This addresses problems of boredom and repetitiveness, similar to the concept of rotating lifeguards throughout the day to prevent boredom and reduction in vigilance.
- Use only manufacturer-authorized replacement parts, where applicable.
- Certain parts of rides and attractions cannot be welded, even by a certified welder. If any cracks are noted in the device, contact the manufacturer to determine the appropriate means to perform a repair or replacement.



## Keep Proper Documentation

There is a saying in the medical field that, “If it wasn’t documented it didn’t happen.” The same is true when performing inspections and documenting incidents at amusement parks and carnivals.

All inspections should be documented and retained electronically. Follow all manufacturer recommendations concerning ages, heights, and weights of riders, as well as the number of riders and allowed activities. Also, make sure all staff is up-to-date on OSHA guidelines.

Document every task completed, even if the task is completed more than once. This will increase efficiency and highlight problems with current processes, making them easier to address.

Mitigate damage claims by developing and implementing an incident-reporting process. Create a claim file that includes:

- A complete and accurate incident report
- Photographic and video evidence
- Witness forms
- Schematic details of the incident
- Participant statements
- Copies of signed waivers and customer contracts
- Insurance broker contact information



## Honoring Traditions and Protecting Our Clients

The start of every amusement park and carnival season is an opportunity to evaluate prior years thoroughly. This is a time to take steps to reduce the likelihood of guest or employee injuries and to improve staff performance, vetting procedures, and training.

At McGowan, we respect the traditions that form the foundation of the amusement park and carnival industry. We are passionate about protecting the interests of our clients, as they deliver the best experience for their guests.

We can help by protecting carnivals and amusement parks from damaging lawsuits, allowing them to continue to grow and flourish.



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