



Go-kart driver asphyxiated by entangled scarf

INCIDENT

A 16 year old indoor go-kart driver was suffocated to the point of unconsciousness when her scarf became entangled with the rear axle of the go-kart.

This incident follows a similar 'near miss' in Blenheim (2008), and go-kart fatalities in Hong Kong (February 2010) and Port Stephens, New South Wales, Australia (April 2010).

CIRCUMSTANCES

The victim was wearing a black scarf beneath a black sweatshirt. The operators of the go-kart amusement facility had conducted visual checks of every driver, but failed to identify the scarf. During the pre-race safety briefing, no specific warning was given to drivers about the dangers of clothing coming loose when driving the go-karts.

The victim's go-kart had a gap between the go-kart frame and the rear left wheel, exposing 60mm of the rear axle.

After completing several laps of the circuit, the victim's scarf loosened and became entangled in the rear left axle. The scarf rapidly wound around the axle, strangling the driver. Fortunately, track marshals quickly realised what had happened and freed the driver, but not before she had lost consciousness.

INVESTIGATION

The Department of Labour's investigation concluded that improvements to the rear axle guarding arrangement were necessary. After consultation with an engineer, the operator fitted a free running metal tube over the exposed portions of the rear axle. During normal operation the tube revolves with the axle, but will remain stationary if objects become entangled around it.

The operator has also taken steps to improve driver safety checks and pre-race safety briefings.

DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR ADVICE

To avoid similar incidents, owners and operators of amusement facilities should:

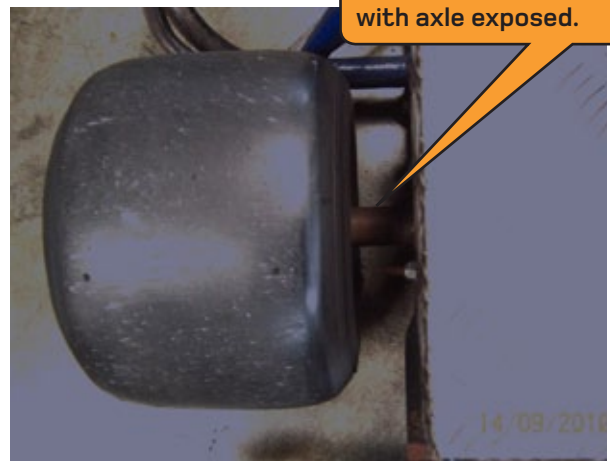
- review their procedures for safety checks and briefings, particularly with respect to clothing that may become loose during the course of the event.
- ensure that moving parts, including rear axles, are guarded to prevent contact by the driver, or by their hair or clothing.

Note: This material has been prepared using the best information available to the Department of Labour at the time of publication. Information may change over time and it may be necessary for you to obtain an update. This material is also only intended to provide general advice and does not constitute legal advice. You should make your own judgement about action you may need to take to ensure you have complied with your workplace health and safety obligations under the law.



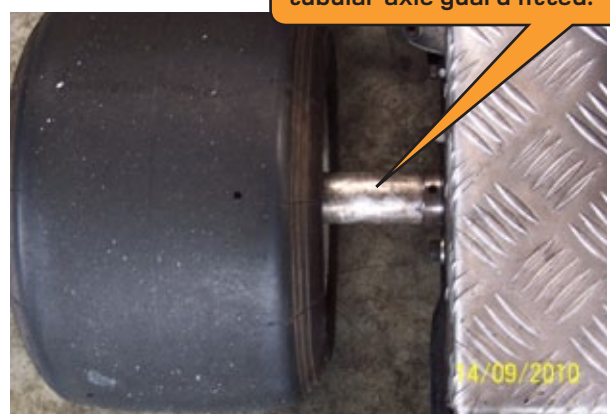
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Torn scarf and sweatshirt belonging to the victim.



Rear wheel of go-kart with axle exposed.

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Rear wheel of go-kart with tubular axle guard fitted.

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