

Kentucky

Fatality

Assessment and

Control

Evaluation Project

Public Health

KY FACE #00KY119

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TO: Michael Auslander, DVM, MSPH, Kentucky Department for Public Health, Division of Epidemiology, Surveillance and Investigations Branch

FROM: Medearis Robertson, KY FACE Field Evaluator

SUBJECT: 15-Year-Old Dies in Utility Golf Cart Overturn

SUMMARY

A fifteen-year-old golf course worker (the victim) was killed when the utility golf cart he was operating overturned. The victim was employed by the golf club adjacent to which he and his family resided and had driven the utility golf cart to his home located at the top of a hill to change clothes. Before leaving work for his residence, he contacted a friend who then came to his house on a regular course golf cart (not a utility cart). After the victim changed clothes, he and his friend left the victim's home. Then on their respective carts, traveled downhill via public and golf course roadways, towards the clubhouse. As they descended the hill, they were reportedly racing when the victim lost control of his cart; it left the roadway and struck a pile of dirt. The vehicle became airborne over a small creek, rotated in the air, throwing the victim from the cart. The victim landed on his head on the opposite side of the creek. Emergency medical services (EMS) was contacted. A physician on the course at the time arrived at the scene and assisted the EMS team. Efforts to revive the victim failed and he was pronounced dead at the scene. In order to prevent similar instances from occurring, FACE investigators recommend that:

- workers under the age of 16 should not operate motorized machines; the Fair Labor Standards Act should be followed.
- utility golf carts should be equipped with seat belts and rollover protection structures (ROPS). Research and certification on the ROPS design is recommended.
- a warning label should be posted, in a highly visible location, stating no one under 16 years of age should operate the vehicle.

INTRODUCTION

On February 26, 2001, FACE investigators were notified of a 15-year-old male golf course worker who had been killed on October 11, 2000, when the utility golf cart he was operating overturned. The county coroner was interviewed by telephone on March 5, 2001. A FACE investigator traveled to the scene of the incident on March 20, 2001 accompanied by the county coroner. That same day, the accident reconstruction officer who had worked the scene was interviewed and case notes and photographs were reviewed. A copy of the death certificate was obtained and reviewed.

The golf course employs seven year-round employees and approximately 30 summer employees and has been operating since 1993. The company had employed the victim for approximately 2.5 months. He was responsible for performing various tasks such as: washing and cleaning golf carts; picking up golf balls and trash from the driving range; picking up trash from around clubhouse area; assisting the grill area by delivering soft drinks. Duties that included a limited use of driving a utility golf cart/golf cart were: parking carts; driving to the driving range to monitor the area; taking trash to the dumpster and delivering soft drinks from a storage area to the grill. The golf director conducts employee safety training for clubhouse employees, while the maintenance supervisor conducts safety training for maintenance employees. Permission slips are obtained from parents of minor employees, which includes permission to drive the utility/golf carts as needed. The victim had participated in these meetings and a permission slip was signed.

INVESTIGATION

The victim's usual shift was from after school (approximately 4:00 PM) to approximately 7:00 PM one afternoon a week and one shift for five or six hours on Saturday or Sunday. On the day of the incident, the victim arrived at work and ate. He then took an electric 1995 EZ Go utility golf cart, model XT-500, up a hill to his residence approximately 1.5 miles away. Prior to leaving, he contacted a friend (another club worker) to meet him at his house. The route to his home required him to drive the cart on private and public roadways. After the victim changed clothes, they left the house and raced their respective carts back toward the clubhouse. The victim was freewheeling down a hill when the cart he was driving fishtailed, left the pavement, traveled on the grass and hit a dirt clod. The vehicle became airborne and flipped depositing the victim in a creek bed where he sustained fatal head injuries. The investigating officer calculated the victim was traveling 28.15 mph. A resident of the golf course, standing in his backyard heard tires squeal and saw a golf cart with a white top roll over. However, this was not the victim's cart; it was the friend's cart. According to the sheriff's report, the victim's friend saw the victim's cart "fishtail, leave the roadway, cross the grass and become airborne". At that point the friend applied his brakes, went sideways and toppled his own cart. He did not see the victim's cart flip nor the victim fall out of the cart. Emergency medical services (EMS) were contacted and a physician at the club was summoned to the scene. The physician aided EMS and CPR was administered, but the victim was pronounced dead at the scene.

CAUSE OF DEATH

The cause of death listed on the death certificate was intra-cranial hemorrhage due to utility golf cart accident.

RECOMMENDATIONS/DISCUSSION

Recommendation #1: Workers under the age of 16 should not operate motorized vehicles. The Fair Labor Standards Act should be followed.

Discussion #1: According to the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) there are 17 prohibited jobs deemed hazardous non-farm jobs that youths under the age of 18 may not perform. Among the jobs listed as being prohibited is “driving a motor vehicle and being an outside helper on a motor vehicle”¹.

Recommendation #2: Rollover protection structures (ROPS) in combination with seatbelts should be standard equipment on utility golf carts/golf carts.

Discussion #2: Utility golf carts should be equipped with ROPS and seatbelts for all passengers. These protection devices could be incorporated into the company’s safety policies. These structures could be incorporated into the canopy portion of the vehicle, or designed to go above the head areas of the passengers of the vehicle.

Recommendation #3: A warning label, stating no one under 16 years of age should operate the vehicle, should be displayed in a prominent location on utility golf carts/golf carts.

Discussion #3: Currently owners of utility golf carts/golf carts can have these labels made and installed.

References

U.S. Department of Labor, Employer’s Guide To Teen Worker Safety,
www.dol.gov/opa/summer/guide/flsa/htm