

CFB: COVER STORY

State doesn't inspect rides exhibited at trade shows

By Jerry W. Jackson | Sentinel Staff Writer
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For attendees to the big amusement park industry convention in Orlando, the rule of thumb is: Ride the new rides at your own risk.

Manufacturers and distributors annually show off a handful of new rides at the trade show, but the products are not inspected in advance by the state of Florida.

"We don't look at them, because there is an exhibitor's exemption" to the state's amusement ride safety inspection laws, said Isadore "Izzy" Rommes, chief of the state Bureau of Fair Rides Inspections. "It's been on the books a long time."

Rommes said he was unaware that a 13-year old boy suffered a broken leg and bruises at the International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions Orlando convention last year, when he fell about 60 feet from a free-fall ride onto padding.

Such incidents are not required to be reported to the state inspection bureau, he said.

"Since these rides are not for public use, for attendees only, the regulations don't apply. But we feel fairly confident that the manufacturers or distributors have a good feel for it, that they've set them up right and that they're safe," Rommes said, because they are being showcased to people who are potential buyers of the products.

"Accidents do happen [at amusement park conventions], but it's isolated," he said.

The IAAPA trade show takes numerous precautions "to make everything as safe as possible," said spokeswoman Beth Robertson, including having an independent inspection company check out all rides and tag them before anyone gets on them.

Manufacturers also are required to provide safety manuals, operator training records and documentation that all government regulatory requirements are met, Robertson said.

Last year's accident was characterized as "operator error" by the German manufacturer of the free-fall ride, Robertson said, a ride that is not at the show this year.

"We've fine-tuned the process," for reviewing safety at the show, Robertson said, but otherwise, no major changes were made.

Bill Avery, a veteran ride-safety consultant in Orlando who attends the trade show every year, said he feels confident the rides, all new, "are as good as they will ever be. This is the last place you would expect they would allow anything to happen" Avery said.

He said he does not ride the rides himself but gives them a close look and would report any problems he saw.

Brenda Brown, risk and safety coordinator for the Orange County Convention Center, said individual show operators including IAAPA are required to carry a minimum of \$1 million in liability insurance coverage for shows, and list the convention center as an additional insured party.

"That would indemnify us, and defend us, if necessary," Brown said. But individual show operators are responsible for their own events and take their own safety precautions without direct oversight from the convention staff, she said. "They police themselves."

Brown said that the county occasionally faces a claim or lawsuit arising from an incident during a convention or trade show, but she was unaware of any instances where the county has had to pay out any damages.

The accident at last year's IAPPA convention has not resulted in a claim or lawsuit, Brown said, although at least one attorney has gathered information from the county about the incident.

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