

## Golf Carts: Cute, Handy.....Dangerous

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At one time golf carts were seen pretty exclusively....on golf courses. Then, since golfing is part of the sports world, other sports saw their usefulness, so carts popped up along the sidelines of football fields and near baseball dugouts, shuttling players about. Today, many more people are aware of the non-sports usefulness of golf carts.....and that is becoming a problem.

Increasingly, more exceptions are being made to allow more people to use carts. At first they could be used on areas close to golf courses, then retirement communities made exceptions, then gated and other, larger property-owner communities allowed their use. Now, exceptions are being made for their limited, public street use in small towns, college communities and in other situations.

The increased use of golf carts means the increased number of golf cart accidents. Such incident are a particular concern since they may involve elderly drivers who may have impairments or slower reaction times. Further, golf carts are popular with very young, frequently unlicensed drivers who may lack care and experience in operating golf carts safely.

Pairing up golf carts with higher risk operators creates a high-risk situation. Consider several features of golf carts:

- Lightweight
- open vehicles without roll bars
- low clearance
- rigid frame construction
- capable of deceptive speed (some models can reach 25 mph)
- do not include seat belts

While carts are ideal for traveling along fairly level, soft-surface areas; their features and design make them quite hazardous for other uses. Some golf carts can move at higher speeds, but their low clearance and rigid structure make them prone to rollovers. While carts are relatively light, they still are easily heavy enough to cause serious, even fatal injury to persons trapped beneath them. It also makes a tremendous difference being in an accident on a grass surface as opposed to an asphalt, gravel, packed-dirt or cement road. Some accident statistics reveal that golf cart accidents often involve children who are hurt when flung from carts during turns.

Another issue with golf carts is that there is no consistent regulation regarding their use and safe operation. The real issue is awareness! Persons who own and use golf carts away from courses should be careful about how they operate such vehicles, who are allowed to drive and ride in them and what safety procedures must be used to minimize accidents. No matter how cute, easy-to-operate and economical they are, golf carts are motorized vehicles that can cause serious loss and injury.....be careful!

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