

Golf Cart Safety: Minimizing Risks on the Course



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Identifying Risks On the Course

Operating a golf cart may seem like a leisurely activity that alleviates extra steps between strokes on the course, but there's much more to it. Golf carts are capable of causing serious injury to your guests, employees, and your club's reputation.

Contrary to popular opinion, golf carts are not safer than vehicles. They can be just as dangerous as driving a car and require the same training and awareness. The number of golf cart-related injuries is rapidly rising and will continue to increase. Protect your business by staying up to date on the latest golf cart safety information.

How Bad Is It?

- Golf cart accidents have increased by 300% since 1990.
- When consumer protection agencies first recorded the spike, there were around 5,000 serious golf cart accidents per year. Now, 30 years later, over 15,000 accidents require a trip to the emergency room each year.
- 156,040 people received emergency room treatment for golf-cart related injuries, according to 2010-17 data from the National Electronic Injury Surveillance System.
- Overall injury rate for older adults climbed to nearly 8.1 per 100,000 in 2017 from approximately 4.8 per 100,000 in 2007—a 67.6% increase.
- Researchers say despite the high rate of injuries, there have been no meaningful changes in golf cart design or legislation to reduce the overall burden of these injuries.
- Children and older adults are especially at risk. 1.6 per 100,000 children's golf cart-related injuries resulted in traumatic brain injuries. This is more than three times the rate incurred by adults (.5 per 100,000) and 46% greater than older adults (1.1 per 100,000).

What Are the Dangers?

- **Injuries:** Golf cart accidents can result in a concussion, fractures, road rash, lacerations, brain damage, and even death.
- **Lack of safety features:** Golf carts often lack seatbelts, airbags, mirrors, lights, doors, and other measures to keep passengers in place.
- **Reckless driving:** According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), nearly 40% of serious golf cart injuries occur when passengers are thrown from the vehicle, usually during a sharp turn.

What Can We Do?

Reducing accidents lies with golf cart drivers who have a duty to drive safely as well as protect passengers and pedestrians. Golf and country club managers can exercise further caution by ensuring only responsible adults get behind the wheel of their golf carts.

That being said, golf cart accidents are wholly preventable. When drivers understand the limitations of their vehicles and the increased risks associated with operating a golf cart, they directly contribute to the reduction of golf cart accidents in the future.

Given the growing capabilities and popularity of golf carts, coupled with the marked increase in golf cart-related injuries observed, intensified efforts are needed to prevent these injuries, especially among children and older adults.

Establish Firm Guidelines

Golf cart safety rules should clearly be communicated to all golf cart operators, passengers, and pedestrians on the course. Our recommended guidelines for golf cart drivers at your club include:

- Maintain the same diligent safety efforts as you would when driving a car.
- Watch your speed. Stay within 5 and 15 mph, and be sure to accommodate the weather, terrain, foot traffic, and other golf carts.
- Do not go over the allowed weight or passenger capacity of the cart. Excess weight increases your chance of injury and can cause undue stress on the tires and engine.
- Everyone needs their own seat, and everyone should remain seated at all times.
- Stay on paths when riding near golfers. Remember pedestrians have the right-of-way.
- Place the cart in neutral and remove the key when it is not in use.
- Always look behind you before backing up.
- Do not shift gears when the cart is in motion.
- Slow down and honk when reaching an intersection to alert others of your presence.
- In the case of threatening weather (thunder or lightning), return to the golf cart storage area and turn it off. The course will close until the threat of inclement weather passes.

Recharging the Battery

Use only an approved battery charger with an automatic shut-off. Do not recharge near an open flame or source of ignition, and do not smoke near the recharging station.

If battery acid spills, pour baking soda on the spill and wash any exposed skin with cold water.

Employees working with golf carts in any capacity should be trained on safe operating procedures and safe recharging practices, as well as first aid.

Keep the Course Safe

Because golf carts are considered vehicles, many of the same rules and principles apply when driving a cart on the course as they do when driving a car on the road.

The bottom line—drive with caution while respecting others, and hold your employees, members, and guests to the same standard.

For more risk management guidance for your golf course or country club, contact our experts today at **800-362-3363** or info@vgmininsurance.com.

