Howard Talks Tech

SUBJECT: **Use of low-speed utility vehicles, (Golf-carts)**

As golf carts zip their way off the golf course and into places like national parks, college campuses, ball fields and Streets Departments, the number of people hurt in them has more than doubled. Researchers at the Center for Injury Sciences report that between 2002 and 2005; 48,255 utility vehicle related injuries occurred. Fractures and head trauma were the most common injuries. Part of the problem is that the carts are faster than they used to be.

But they are also being used in ways they were not necessarily intended for and are carrying extra people. Many of the injuries were caused by falls, which can occur at speeds as low as 11 miles per hour when the cart turns. And newer carts can hit 25 mph. These older carts often lack safety equipment; the majority of those out there do not have seat belts.

Based on CPSC statistics, roughly 35% of utility car accidents involve a person falling out of the cart. The American National Standards Institute golf cart safety standard, Z130.1, does not require seatbelts for utility carts. As a result, it is prudent to equip golf cars with passive restraints that will protect unbelted passengers from ejection. In place of seatbelts, golf cart standards require readily accessible handholds and body restraints that prevent the occupants from sliding to the outside of the vehicle. One common scenario for a passenger ejection accident occurs when a cart, traveling near its maximum speed is turned sharply to the left. During a sharp left turn, centrifugal acceleration forces tend to force the passenger to his right, which can lead to ejection.

In addition to ejection accidents, at least 10% of utility cart accidents involve a rollover and statistics indicate that such accidents are roughly twice as likely to lead to injuries requiring a hospital stay as non-rollover accidents. Rollovers often occur as a result of a driver losing control of the cart while traveling downhill on a car path. One potential source of a downhill loss of control is the current industry practice of manufacturing utility carts with brakes on only the rear axle wheels. It has long been understood that a braked vehicle with skidding rear tires and rolling front tires is directionally unstable

If you have these vehicles you should develop a written policy regarding who and under what conditions that may be used and you should provide your employees with specific training.