

# Safety first

The amusement park industry considers safety to be its number one priority, says **Karen Staley**, and works constantly to lower the risks associated with fairground rides

**R**eading Bill Newton Dunn's article in the 24 January edition of the Parliament Magazine, you could be forgiven for thinking that Europe's amusement parks and travelling fairs have a poor safety record. Even if Newton Dunn's figures were accurate, which they are not, nothing could be further from the truth. While the thrills and excitement of many rides may suggest an element of danger, amusement rides are, in fact, some of the safest leisure activities of all.

Indeed, safety is the industry's number one priority. It is also an issue of such importance that we need to be sure of our facts. Extrapolation of EU-wide data from selectively used data applying to one EU member state gives a false picture. Over the last three years, we in the European chapter of the International association of amusement parks and attractions (IAAPA) have been tracking and documenting the safety record of amusement parks (permanent fixed facilities) in Europe in our annual survey, the European ride safety reporting system. This survey is carried out for us by independent consultants. These results show how the safety measures taken by amusement parks have succeeded in keeping the number of incidents very low. It was a similar picture in 2007 and 2008. Yet we know there is always more to do.

#### A few facts from 2009's European ride safety reporting system:

The top 20 parks attracted more than a third of all park visitors in Europe - 57 million out of 160 million.

A third (108) of Europe's 330 amusement parks responded to a survey. In total, these parks received about 100 million visitors - nearly two thirds of all amusement park visits in the year. These visitors took an estimated 650 million safe rides.

The risk of a park visitor suffering serious injuries is about one per seven million passenger rides. A serious injury is defined as one requiring a hospital stay of at least 24 hours or resulting in fatality. IAAPA Europe recorded two fatalities - one visitor and one employee.

Additional research carried out by our IAAPA colleagues in the United States suggests that amusement park visitors are 10 to 100 times less likely to be involved in a serious incident than participants in many other recreational and sporting activities, ranging from roller skating to fishing and golf.



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The 2004 European standard on "fairground and amusement park machinery and structures" is hugely important and we remain committed to it. There is also a new initiative to develop a global standard on the "safety of amusement rides and amusement devices" which will be modelled on the European standard, and we organise regular safety seminars for members.

Our members work closely with health and safety authorities in their countries. One example of this collaboration is the UK's amusement devices and inspection procedures scheme (ADIPS). The British government's health and safety executive (HSE) is rather more positive about this than Newton Dunn. Its website declares, "HSE firmly believes that ADIPS has contributed to the reduction in fairground accidents over recent years."

Safety is the single most important priority for IAAPA Europe and its members. We are always ready to discuss ways of improving the industry's record still further, but this is a complex topic needing debate that is both constructive and well informed. ★

**Karen Staley** is executive director of the International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions Europe