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# A Case for Golf Cart Seat Belts in The Villages

***Editor's Note: Our friend Parker Sykes who wrote the fantastic ["50 Things to Think About Before Buying a Home in The Villages"](#) is back this week, and this time he's writing about why he thinks everyone in The Villages should install and use seat belt: on their golf carts. Here's Parker.***

If you were shopping and pushing your grandson or granddaughter in a shopping cart and that cart came with a seatbelt, would you strap them in?

What if they were being pulled in a plastic wagon with straps to keep them from falling out would you use those?

What if they were riding in a go-cart?

Now answer this question. If I were to tell you that I will be driving your grandchild around the neighborhood in an open vehicle with no doors and a top speed of 20 mph on roads shared with full size motor vehicles, would you want to know if it had seatbelts?

OK, maybe the grandkid example fits only when they come to visit periodically, but all of the adults traveling around The Villages are also vulnerable.

Seat belts are not just for kids. Unfortunately many (if not most) people throughout The Villages still aren't using seat belts.

## Some of the Most Commonly Stated Reasons For Not Installing and Using Seat Belts in Your Golf Cart

### **1. They are inconvenient, difficult to use, restrict my freedom of movement, etc.**

OK, that may be a bit true – it's just a risk you're willing to take. Of course, you could say the same thing about your car's seat belts and most people don't think twice about using those.

### **2. I'm a careful driver and obey the speed limits, so I don't need them.**

It is called an "accident" for a reason. If only you were the only one in control of every situation, you never became distracted, and you could always control what your passenger was doing while you're driving, then maybe you could rationalize taking the risk.

Of course, most ejection accidents involve a passenger, not the driver. As a driver you can anticipate how the cart will move because you are controlling it. Plus you are holding on to

the steering wheel.

The same cannot always be said for your passengers.

### **3. My cart didn't come with seat belts and they are too expensive to install.**

Given what we spend for our customized golf carts the \$150 or so install price is pretty insignificant.

### **4. I don't buy the "ejection" argument, and in a collision situation I think I, or my passenger, could jump and avoid serious injury.**

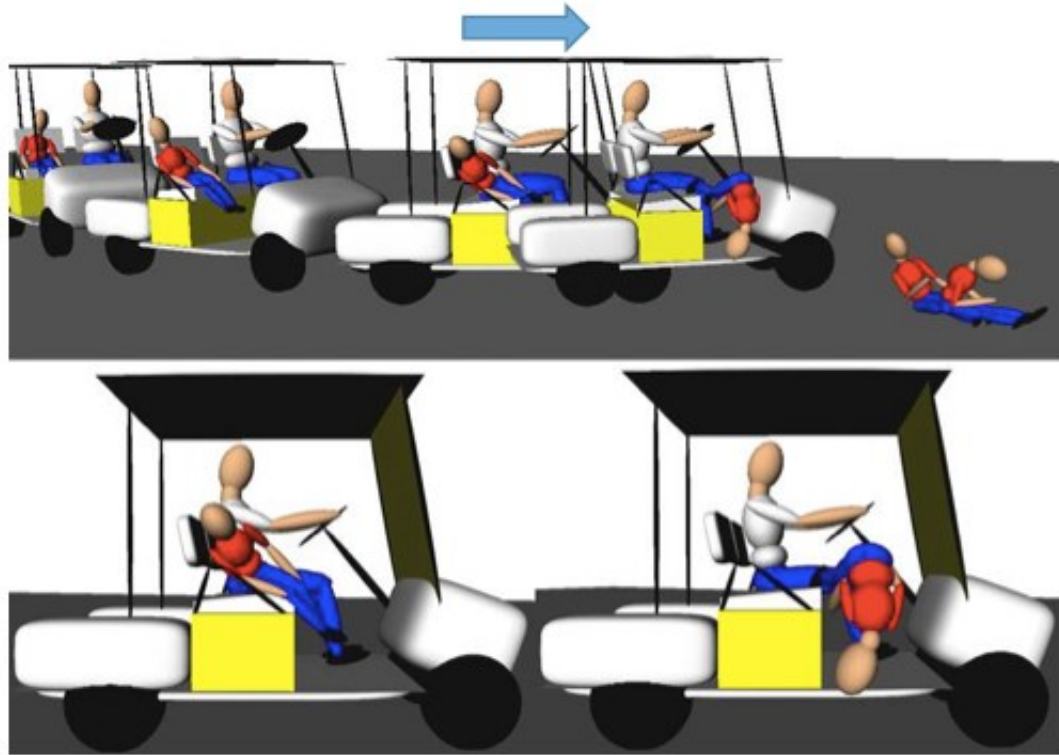
Well, that sounds like the early arguments when auto seat belts came on the scene. Remember the argument that if my car ended up in a river I might not be able to unbuckle my belt? Hopefully everyone will agree that the jury is in on that one.

To further reinforce the ejection accident mode just consider the data compiled by local law enforcement, the POA, the VHA, and others. Serious injury or death in many cases is due to a passenger's head striking the pavement when they are ejected from a moving vehicle, which is also the leading cause of golf cart accidents resulting in an emergency room visit nationwide.

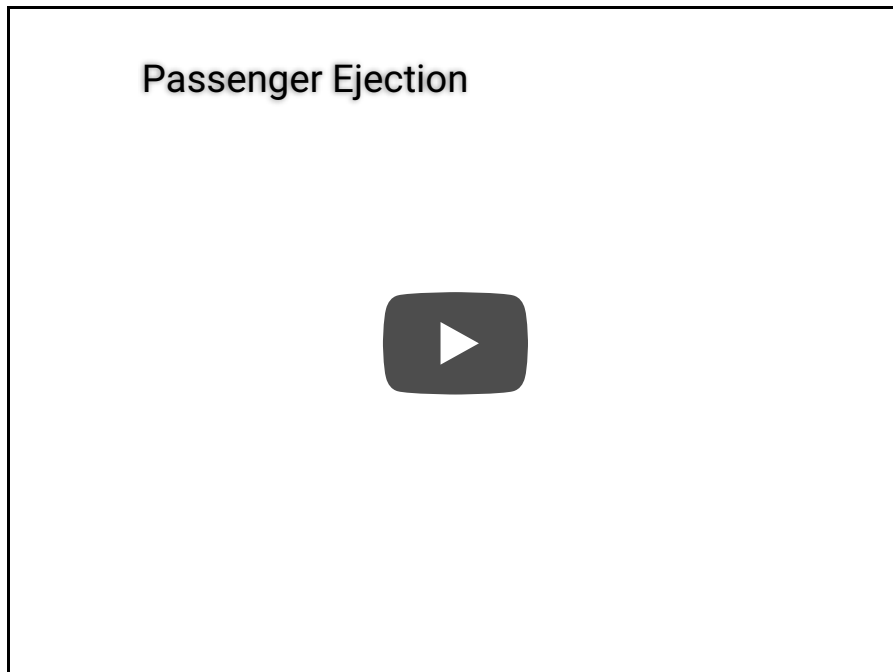
One study that has been done on this is titled "[ANALYSIS AND PREVENTION OF CHILD EJECTIONS FROM GOLF CARS AND PERSONAL TRANSPORT VEHICLES](#)".

The computer simulation graphic from that study helps make the ejection risk point. Note the pivoting of the body over the side hip restraint in such a way that the passenger (a child in this case) strikes the pavement head first!

As the study explains, even holding onto the outboard handle doesn't guarantee your passenger will stay in the cart.



Here's a video animation:



**5. If seat belts were really important the manufacturers would install them.**

Golf carts as we know them today came into wider use starting back in the '50s. The major manufacturers did, and continue to focus on fleet golf cart sales to golf courses. The quantities produced and the affordability of these fleet carts simply found their way into general use on city streets in golf course communities, small towns, and urban areas over the years.

Typical golf carts are designed and manufactured to meet an ANSI (American National Standards Institute) safety standard which limits the maximum speed to 15 mph and does not require (or prohibit) seat belts.

It is worth noting however, that this ANSI safety standard was written entirely by a committee of the major golf car manufacturers. These companies have always maintained that seat belts aren't warranted for golf course use because in a rollover event a golfer would be better off jumping clear rather than being belted in the cart and getting crushed - after all, the argument goes, the overhead sun/rain canopy isn't designed for a full rollover situation.

However, there is no scientific evidence to back up this claim. On the contrary, even in situations where the probability of rollover is high, most carts simply end up on their side since even the standard roof supports are usually enough to prevent more than 1/4 roll.

## **6. If golf cart seat belts save lives the federal government would mandate seat belts.**

The serious injury/death situation did become evident to the federal government's NHTSA (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration) back in the 90's.

At that time some states and local governments already had in place restricted use requirements, including mirrors, lights, horn, etc. However, due to intense lobbying by the golf cart manufacturer's trade organization, and the major manufacturer's dealer organizations, the 0-20 mph speed range was left out of NHTSA's federal regulations, leaving golf carts completely unregulated.

Instead a new category of vehicle called a Low Speed Vehicle (LSV) was created covering only the 20-25 mph top speed range — which by the way included a seat belt requirement in the standard.

If you want to read further you can find the [final rule document here](#).

Contained within the data collected in preparation of this NHTSA standard is seat belt usage information collected from Sun City Arizona and Palm Desert California where they found that seat belts were effective in preventing serious injury/death due to ejection.

These comments go back to mid 90's!

Seat belts are also required for operation on public streets in some states and municipalities (e.g. OH, WA, TX), but the industry has mostly successfully lobbied to prevent those requirements at the state and federal level.

Again, seat belts and other substantial safety items were included in the new LSV regulations, but the 20 mph and under carts were left unregulated.

The golf cart manufacturers continue to maintain that they produce golf carts in complete compliance with the ANSI safety standard (which they themselves write!).

Anyone notice the circular logic here? Could it be that the manufacturers are thinking about potential liability?

In summary, our 20 mph golf carts aren't designed or manufactured for use on the roadways, they're designed for golf courses. They've been modified to go 20 mph by changing out gears, installing larger tires, adjusting the gas engine governor, installing higher speed electric cart motors/controls, and so on.

There are no roadway crashworthiness requirements incorporated into their design.

Granted, to meet state and local community vehicle standards they have mirrors, lights, horns, and a few other safety features. But, we are pretty much left with trying to use common sense (and complying with the law) to improve our safety while traveling in these carts.

The limited structural integrity of the cart is still better than your body if something crashes into you, or if you crash into a tree, or another cart.

Staying in the cart is better than the thrown-free/jump-free alternative.

Lots of good data and prior studies have shown that ejection risks could all but be eliminated with firmly secured seat belts (and shoulder belts if possible).

Please, install and wear seat belts at all times, with the possible exception of traveling on the golf course.