



July 26, 2000

Dear Ejection Seat Ride Owner,

There have been a few incidents and accidents this season that have produced some injuries and one broken ankle. Please take the time to read this carefully and to hold a safety meeting with all your employees so these incidents can be prevented.

**Incident #1**

**Lake of the Ozarks, Missouri  
Permanent 120-foot Ejection Seat  
Towers Fabricated by Cascade Manufacturing  
July 2000  
Tower Collapsed**

Description of Incident:

One of the permanent towers collapsed while the bungee cords were being tightened prior to launching the chair. The outside leg of the three-sided tower at about 40-feet up from the ground experienced a complete failure. The leg was made from solid round bar stock and failed right above the flange. Initial reports indicate that the leg severed right through the fillet weld.

The tower was pulled over into the other tower damaging both towers. Two riders were injured with a broken ankle the most serious injury.

Analysis:

Gravity Works immediately contacted all permanent ride owners and instructed them to have an NDT certified company come out and inspect the tower leg to flange welds on all tower sections.

At this point all rides have been inspected with only one crack found on a ride in Gulf Shores, Alabama. This tower was also found to have undercut in most of the tower leg to flange welds. As of today all deficient welds have been repaired and are just waiting to be reinspected. This tower was fabricated by ESC() of Burleson, Texas.

The tower that fell was designed by Chi Lee for a 70-mph wind zone. The wind loads governed the design of the tower. In order to verify that there are no strange dynamics after launching the chair that would cause higher cyclic loads than were anticipated, we hired an independent firm to test for the stress range the tower legs are subjected to.

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Gravity Works, Inc.  
790 Yuba Drive  
Mountain View  
California 94041  
650  
924.903.1450  
650  
1.415.903.7450



What we found was that the leg stresses are indeed low and at this point would indicate an almost infinite life. The fact that the tower failed after less than 20,000 launches would seem to indicate that there were defects in the towers after manufacturing. The insurance company is investigating the failure. Gravity Works will keep everyone informed as more information is learned.

Corrective Action:

All permanent rides are to have their leg to flange welds inspected annually by a certified NDT company. The process is to be magnetic particle. This is an easy and effective test for locating surface cracks. If any cracks are found, Gravity Works needs to be notified in order to specify the proper repair procedure.

In addition, any crack that would completely sever a solid 2-inch steel rod would have existed for some time before the final failure. **Do not become complacent in your inspections of the tower sections.** Every 2000 launches your towers must be inspected completely by your employees.

**Incident #2**

**Pigeon Forge, Tennessee  
70-foot Permanent Ejection Seat  
July 2000  
Broken Hoist Cable**

Description of Incident:

A hoist cable was severed on a 70-foot permanent Ejection Seat in Pigeon Forge after the launch was over and the operator was lowering the chair back to the ground.

After the ride was completed the operator attempted to lower the chair but the chair would not lower beyond a certain point. The operator then tried to raise the chair. The chair rose slightly and then the cable broke causing the chair to swing into the tower.

The operator lowered the chair, brought the riders to the ground, and unloaded them. The riders suffered minor injuries and spent the rest of the following day riding the rides for free.

Analysis:

After talking with the operator and ride owner what became apparent was that the ride was lowered too soon after the chair was launched. The chair was still bouncing up and

Gravity Works, Inc.  
700 Yuba Drive  
Mountain View  
California, 94041  
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down. The sudden reversing of the winch while the chair was still rebounding caused the Nord winch drum to flip a wrap of cable off of the drum.

The cable became entangled and subsequent lowering caused the cable to hoist in rather than to pay out cable. The hoist cable was then lowered on one side and raised on the other. This caused the cable to kink severely as the winch stalled and applied full stall torque. This stall torque was equal to 180% of maximum torque. This condition could cause the cable to see over 4000 pounds.

The breaking strength of 3/8" XIPS IWRC cable is a little over 15,000 pounds. The stalled winch could not generate enough force to break the cable unless the cable was seriously damaged already.

Corrective Action:

1. Do not begin lowering the chair until the chair is no longer bouncing up and down. All winching systems need some weight at the end of the cable in order for the cable to come off the winch drum correctly. Most hoists use a heavy ball at the end of the hoisting cable to keep some tension on the cable for proper operation of the winch. The weight of the bungee cords, swivels, and chair is more than adequate for the proper operation of the Nord winching system. However, if the chair is still rebounding then there is not enough weight on the hoisting cable for cable to peel off the winch properly.
2. Gravity Works is designing a roller system to keep the cable from flipping off the Nord winch drum should an operator begin to lower the chair before the bouncing has subsided. We should have a system out to all owners within the next 30 days. The only modification to your winches will be to drill two mounting holes in your winch frame. We will provide the mounting hardware with the roller system.
3. Grind the three Nord winch drum cheek plates to a full radius. The cheek plates are 3/8" thick mild steel plates. This rounding of the plates will prevent the cable from becoming severely kinked should a malfunction ever cause the cable to flip off the drum. Remove the cable completely from the winch drum before grinding the cheek plates.

Ride owners have 30 days from this directive to grind the cheek plates and to install the roller system.

Gravity Works, Inc.  
190 Yuba Drive  
Mountain View  
California 94061  
650 477-0011  
650 477-0011  
f. 650.001.3500



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**Incident #3**

**Daytona Beach, Florida**  
**120-foot Permanent Ejection Seat**  
**July 2000**  
**Improperly Swaged Hoist Cable**

Description of Incident:

Hoist cables were replaced on a permanent Ejection Seat in Daytona Beach, Florida. After the chair was launched and had a few rebounds the hoist cable slipped through the swage. The cable became detached from the swivel causing the chair to swing into one of the towers.

Two female teenage riders were in the chair at the time of the accident. They were suspended sideways in the chair for about 90 minutes until the fire department was able to bring them down. Both girls suffered minor injuries.

Analysis:

The manufacturer of the cable assembly was contacted and upon examination of the cable took full responsibility for an improperly swaged sleeve on the cable. Initial reports seem to show that the dead end of the cable was never fully inserted into the sleeve before it was compressed around the cable.

Corrective Action:

Because of this accident and other close calls with the hoist cables in the past, Gravity Works is now requiring all ride operators to purchase their hoist cables from Gravity Works. We have developed a program with a manufacturer for insuring that hoist cables for the Ejection Seat are properly made, documented, serialized, and proof loaded prior to installation on any Ejection Seat.

This quality program will insure that the cables are all made from one controlled source from only domestic wire rope. In addition, each cable will be dynamically tested after the end is swaged. This load is 200% of the safe working load. The safe working load is 1.4 tons.

In addition, the hoist cables must be replaced annually or sooner if the cable exhibits any of the wear conditions delineated in the Operation and Maintenance Manual.

Ride owners have 30 days from this directive to replace the hoist cables with cables provided by Gravity Works.

*Peter Horkelman*

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Gravity Works, Inc.  
 190 Yuba Drive  
 Mountain View  
 California 94041  
 415-903-1546  
 ESC  
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