

State law is used to close Branson ride

By RICK ALM
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Missouri's emergency rule for shutting down amusement park rides was used last weekend for the first time when a roller coaster's brakes failed at the Branson USA park Saturday and the train ran into another parked on the same track.

Assistant State Fire Marshal Randy Cole said eight persons were injured, none seriously.

An inspection of the ride was to take place today under a state law passed in 1997 and tightened with amendments last year.

The southwest Missouri park also must absorb all costs of the emergency inspection by a commercial firm, plus any repairs, before the "Firestorm" ride is allowed to re-open, Cole said.

"We cannot find any problem," said park manager Wayne Leatherman, who has not ruled out operator error in braking the three-car train at the end of its run, which reaches a top speed of 40 mph.

He said the park's rides are inspected daily by two specially trained employees.

"We're not some fly-by-night operation that doesn't take this seriously," Leatherman said.

In another weekend incident, a 5-year-old Pleasant Hill boy was endangered Sunday evening when he apparently slid under a safety bar while aboard a traveling carnival's "Viper" ride at the Cass County Fair.

The operator noticed the problem and shut the ride down, but not before David Barber of Pleasant Hill jumped onto the still-spinning apparatus to secure his son Bobby.

"Our kids will never ride another carnival ride," Barber said Monday, recalling the terrifying moments when he feared his son might be flung from the octopuslike ride. "We'll stick to Worlds of Fun and things like that."

Cole said the Viper, owned by Davidson Amusements of Wayland, Mo., passed an inspection in April and had a state fire marshal's permit to accommodate the public. Davidson company phones in Missouri and Texas were not answered Monday.

Cole said that ride manufacturers set safety standards, including the minimum allowed height for riders, but that it was up to ride operators to post and enforce those standards. Standards for each ride are not kept on file with the state. The

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