

# Accident closes Branson park ride

By Hannah Bergman  
News-Leader

BRANSON — The Windstorm roller coaster at Branson USA theme park will remain closed today in the wake of a weekend accident that sent several riders to the hospital.

Eight were transported by ambulance and private car Saturday night to Skaggs Community Health Center after the set of three cars in which they were riding failed to stop and ran into an empty car on the coaster, fire officials said Sunday.

Three of the injured were minors, said Ted Martin, division chief for the Branson Fire Department. All eight, treated for bruises and scrapes, were released from the hospital, he said.

"The Fire Department responded to a report of an accident at the Branson USA theme park at 10:27," Martin said. "Our immediate concern was the triage patients," he said. "Then we went ahead and started the investigation."

Of the two trains on the coaster, one was empty and waiting to be loaded when the accident occurred, he said. The train on which the passengers were riding was completing a ride.

There are seven fin brakes that function as one large brake to stop the cars, said Duane Compton, regional chief inspector for the Missouri Fire Marshal's Office. The setup is similar to that of an automobile — there are four brakes, one for each wheel, which all work together.

"For some reason, either one or some of the brakes did not set up properly," said amusement park manager Wayne Leatherman, "and did not get the car slowed down as slow as it should have been."

"It came on around and bumped into the back of the train sitting in the loading dock."

When the Fire Department arrived, some of the injured people had been transported to a first-aid tent, but others remained on the ride.

"The Branson USA staff did a great job of working with the patients before the emergency staff arrived," said Martin.

Investigation into the

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accident began Saturday night after the scene was cleared.

"What we did (Saturday) night was simply interview the park management and the operator team," said Martin.

An injured man was also interviewed at Skaggs Community Health Center, Compton said.

The investigation will continue this week as the ride is tested, he said.

"We will probably in this instance call in a outside person that is familiar with this particular roller coaster and that has some experience with it to assist with the investigation," said Compton.

In accordance with a state law passed in the mid-'90s, the ride was shut down immediately Saturday night and will remain closed until the investigation is complete, Compton

said.

"It kicks in when there are more than three people transported off-site to a medical care facility or when one serious physical injury occurs," he said.

That law was revised last year by the state legislature to force yearly inspections of all amusement park rides before they begin operation.

At Branson USA, the rides were inspected before the park opened for the season in May. All the rides passed, Compton said.

The park does daily inspections and test runs of its rides and he said logs from those runs will be reviewed.

Seasonal inspections fall under the public safety domain of the fire marshal.

The investigation will continue with that in mind, Martin said.

"Safety is the utmost concern."

Leatherman said the ride would remain closed until a satisfactory explanation for the accident was found.

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