

know risk

Ansvar Insurance Ltd. Level 18, 303 Collins St Melbourne, Victoria 3000. ABN 21 007 216 506 AFSL 237826
Members of the Ecclesiastical Insurance Group

Camp Equipment: Flying Foxes, High Ropes & Giant Swings

Ansvar Insurance has seen a number of claims arising out of the use of flying foxes and similar equipment. Seemingly each incident is unique and often dismissed as a 'one off' but a closer look usually reveals a deficiency in one of the following areas: risk assessments, equipment, training and supervision.

Case Study 1

In 2002 the user assisted in the construction of a flying fox. Contrary to recommended procedures the flying fox was not tested prior to use and the user fell 5m when it collapsed, sustaining very severe back injuries.

Case Study 2

In 2004 a nine year old girl was briefly unsupervised on the launch platform of a flying fox. It is not clear if the harness had been improperly fitted or in the brief time alone the girl interfered with the harness and attachments. The girl was flown to hospital with multiple fractures, a ruptured spleen, a torn pancreas, severe concussion and a bruised heart. The campsite was fined \$35,000.

Case Study 3

In 2007 a nine year old boy was the first to use a flying fox. Upon release to descend the ride he fell approximately 9 metres to the ground. Following the fall he lost consciousness for a very brief time and was diagnosed with a hairline fracture of the pelvis and a fractured sacrum. The Division of Workplace Health and Safety (DWHS) were notified of the incident.

Risk Assessments

The risk assessment process should be integral to all activities involving camp equipment. Whether it is during the design, installation, maintenance or actual use - the questions: 'what can go wrong?' and 'how can I prevent it?' should constantly be asked.

More formally, systems and procedures should be introduced to ensure that the safest methods are consistently employed.

Activity Equipment

Design

In Case Study 2 the company that provided the seat harness was fined over \$7,500. While the harness did not contribute to the incident, the seat harness on its own was considered unsuitable to restrain a user in a situation of possible inversion.

When constructing and repairing activity equipment, it is always preferable to engage specialist firms who are qualified and experienced in the design, construction and installation of safe equipment. It is also important to check that the firm you are engaging can supply you with a copy of their current insurance policy.

For further information Workcover Victoria provides a range of safe design specifications and relevant Australian Standards which can be found on the Worksafe website. Visit www.worksafe.vic.gov.au and type flying foxes in the keyword search.

Maintenance

While equipment may be safe when first installed, it will only remain safe if properly maintained. Procedures should be in place for cleaning, storing, discarding and replacing components as required.

All operators and supervisors must understand and be aware of when components require replacement or repair.

Protective Equipment

In the past, camps have been criticised for not making use of safety equipment such as shoulder restraints and helmets even though they are readily available. In most cases, poor supervision is the reason behind the lack of use of protective equipment.

It is incumbent upon camp owners to ensure that protective equipment is available to all users of camp equipment.

Training, competency, and safe operating procedures

As with the use of any potentially dangerous equipment all operators of flying foxes should be trained and possess the required skills and knowledge.

A one off training session is not enough. Each operator should receive follow up training and be able to demonstrate competency in the safe operation of the equipment.

Once the operator has the knowledge and is competent, it is vital that procedures are in place to check equipment and to closely monitor the user and the equipment to ensure safe operation.

Supervision

In Case Study 2 the owner was deemed to have failed in their duty of care because the flying fox was not adequately staffed and in particular, did not have a supervisor on the platform to ensure the user could ride safely and ensure all equipment was properly fitted and attached.

The majority of incidents dealt with by Ansva Insurance occur from a lack of adequate supervision. Usually where standards have relaxed and supervision has become somewhat casual.

Another common scenario is where supervision of the activity is left to people who are not intimately familiar with the operation of equipment e.g. a school teacher, youth group leader or perhaps junior campsite employee. Perhaps the most hazardous scenario occurs when a young child is allowed or instructed to use the equipment with no supervision at all.

Close and thorough supervision should be provided when fitting the harness to the user and at all times while the equipment is in use.

Summary

The safety of flying foxes, high ropes course, giant swings and the like is reliant upon four factors:

1. Continuous and comprehensive risk assessments of activities.
2. Equipment which is professionally designed, constructed, installed and maintained.
3. Operators and supervisors who have demonstrated competence in the use and maintenance of equipment and who have a thorough understanding of what is required to run a safe activity.
4. Constant and vigilant supervision of the activity and the general environment by experienced and trained operators.

For further information on Risk Management or for information on how we can assist with your insurance requirements, please contact Ansva Insurance on 1800 729 513.

References

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