

Adventure Equipment - Flying Foxes

Ansvar Insurance has been involved in a number of recent claims arising out of the use of flying foxes despite warnings and recommendations by Victorian Workcover authorities. Seemingly each incident is unique and often dismissed as a 'one off' but a closer look usually reveals common element.

Case Study 1

A young 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 or attachments. The girl fell 12m and suffered multiple fractures, a ruptured spleen, a torn pancreas, severe concussion and a bruised heart. The operator fined \$35,000 by the local workcover authority.

Case Study 2

A young boy was the first to use a flying fox. Upon being released 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 local workcover authorities were notified and are now investigating.

Case Study 3

A mobile scissor lift was used to safely bring children down from a flying fox at the end of the ride. Unfortunately there was a delay in bringing down the previous user and a young boy was sent down the flying fox without knowing the scissor lift was still in his flight path. He collided with the scissor lift while descending and suffered head injuries as a result

Risk Assessments

Risk assessments must be integral to all flying fox activities. Whether it's during the design, installation, maintenance or actual use - the questions: 'what can go wrong?' and 'how can I prevent it?' must constantly be asked.

Consider not only the obvious risk such as falls from height but also the landing and departing from the flying fox. In many cases formal systems and procedures have been introduced as a result of risk assessments. It is critical that these are always followed without exception.

Can you be sure that your procedures are always adhered to?

Activity Equipment

Design – When constructing or repairing flying foxes, specialist firms must be engaged who are qualified and experienced in the design, construction and installation of safe equipment. It is also important to check that these firms can supply you with a current insurance certificate.

Maintenance - While equipment may be safe when first installed, it only remains safe if it is properly maintained. Procedures must be in place for cleaning, storing and replacing components as required. All flying fox operators must understand and be aware of when components require replacement or repair.

Is your flying fox equipment checked before each and every session?

Protective Equipment - In the past, operators have been criticised when safety equipment such as shoulder restraints or helmets have not been used even though they were readily available.

Poor supervision is often the reason why. It is incumbent upon operators to ensure that protective equipment is available to all users of camp equipment

Training and Experience

As with any potentially hazardous equipment, flying fox operators must be trained and possess the skills and knowledge to operate them safely.

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

Not only must operators know how to use the flying fox safely, they must also be able to identify if parts are worn or broken and likely to cause an injury.

Supervision

In the first case study the operator 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 all equipment was properly fitted and attached.

The majority of incidents dealt with by Ansvar Insurance occur when standards have been relaxed and supervision has become somewhat casual.

Other injuries have occurred when supervision is left to people who are not intimately familiar with the operation of equipment, for example a school teacher, youth group leader or a 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 must be provided when fitting the harness to the user and at all times when the equipment is in use.

Summary

The safe operation of flying foxes is reliant upon:

1. Continuous and comprehensive risk assessments of activities.

2. Professionally designed, constructed and maintained equipment.
3. Experienced, trained and risk aware operators.
4. Constant and vigilant supervision of the activity.

But, in each of our case studies the operators took meticulous care to ensure the safety of the users. It was a simple break from their normal rigorous safety procedures which led to catastrophic consequences.

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

This material is for information purposes only. It is not intended to give specific legal or risk management advice nor are any suggestions, checklists or action plans intended to include or address all possible risk management exposures or solutions.

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