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Description

With roller coasters across the country getting faster and faster, some thrill seekers and safety experts are concerned about the increase of G-forces and how they might cause injuries to riders.

Keywords


Transcript

G-Forces and the Safety of Roller Coasters

TOM BROKAW, anchor:

Summer is coming on fast, the peak season for carnivals and theme parks, thrills and chills, especially on the new high-speed big-drop roller coasters. And that brings us to the “Nightly News Question,” where
was the first modern roller coaster? The answer is A, Paris, in 1817. But it reached speeds of only 40 miles per hour, giving it just enough momentum to complete a circular track. Now, roller coasters more closely resemble a rocket ship on liftoff, complete with body-bending G-forces. But have they gone too far? NBC's Robert Hager tonight on one state's crackdown.

ROBERT HAGER reporting:
Norgenia Kelley believes she suffered a brain injury after she was whipped around on a roller coaster.
Ms. NORGENIA KELLEY: I went to look in the mirror and I couldn't see half of my face in the mirror because my vision was blurry.
HAGER: As rides push 100 miles an hour and grow ever wilder, some ask, how much body and brain can endure.

HAGER: Astronauts lifting off feel a crushing force of three G’s. That means their bodies seem three times heavier than normal. Indy 500 drivers, three G’s as well. But riders on most roller coasters feel four G’s or more, some close to six.
Now here in New Jersey, this state is about to become first in the nation to propose a regulation, slapping a limit on G-forces on roller coasters. And what New Jersey does may one day become the standard for other states.

On Monday, New Jersey will propose caps of two and a half to six G’s vertically depending on how long the G’s last and one to two and a half G’s side to side. Congressman Ed Markey says, `About time.'

Representative ED MARKEY (Democrat, Massachusetts): We have right now in America a roller coaster arms race where each amusement park advertises that they have the fastest, the most dangerous ride.

HAGER: There have been deaths and injuries. But doctors disagree whether they could be from G-forces alone. Could there have been other problems? Park operators say the forces aren't bad. Gary Story, president of the Six Flags chain.

Mr. GARY STORY: G-forces on roller coasters last for nanoseconds.

HAGER: But the industry won't oppose new standards.

Mr. STORY: No one cares any more than we do about the safety of our guests in the park. And we are-- we are all about safety. We are all about science and studying these issues.

HAGER: With another season coming on, the goal is safety and thrills. Controlling the G’s without spoiling the gee-whiz’s. Robert Hager, NBC News, Mount Holly, New Jersey.