

S. C. W.P.

13 Jan 1985

Action on 'danger' rides

By VICKY WONG

Children's slot-machine rides which could pose risks to users may soon come under the control of legislation to ensure they conform to stipulated standards of safety and maintenance.

At present, Hongkong's two large amusement ride facilities — Ocean Park and Laichikok Amusement Park — are governed by temporary safety control measures.

The Government intends to replace these with long-term statutory controls under the proposed Places of Public Entertainment Ordinance.

Initially, it was thought that smaller children's rides centres, with their relatively simple facilities, would be exempt from control under the proposed legislation because they pose fewer risks than the high-speed rides in the amusement parks.

But a survey of seven centres carried out by the

Electrical and Mechanical Services Department about a year ago found that the standard of safety and equipment maintenance in the majority of the smaller centres left much to be desired.

It was also found that many new designs of rides are available nowadays and they may pose an increased element of risk to users compared to the simpler coin-operated variety.

The survey also found:
● Some rides were poorly maintained and had sharp edges and protrusions liable to cause cuts and injuries.

● In case of emergency, machines could not be stopped except by pulling out the electric plug or by switching off the current at the main fuse box.

● Some rides were not fenced in and children could wander on to the tracks and be hit by moving parts.

● Many battery-operated

bumper cars were of such a design that children could easily fall out. Some were so badly damaged that chains and moving parts had become exposed and rubber fenders had worn away to show the metal underneath.

Batteries in some cars were often inadequately secured in places where children could easily get at them, risking exposure to live terminals and acid.

● Some rides did not have a mechanism to make them stop should a child accidentally or intentionally get off while they were still in motion.

● Exposed electric cables were found in places where children could touch them.

According to Mr Tong Kin-wah, chief engineer in the legislation enforcement division of the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department, the Government has no record of how many chil-

dren may have been injured while playing at these centres, although there is little doubt that accidents have occurred.

What is not known relates to the seriousness and frequency of injuries.

"A child will probably not die if anything happens," Mr Tong said. "But the risk of injury is there."

There are about 40 children's rides centres in Hongkong, licensed by the Urban Services Department.

The licences, renewable annually, are issued under the Places of Public Entertainment Ordinance and carry certain conditions, one of which requires the operator to appoint a "qualified person" who is responsible for ensuring that the equipment is in safe and good working order.

This person is required to certify this in writing every three months.

(Cont'd on Page 6, Col 3)

Risky rides face new controls

(Cont'd from Page 1)

Licences are not issued until the competency of these qualified people has been vetted and approved by the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department.

However, the monitoring of the performance of these people rests with the USD, not the department.

And it would appear the USD has problems enforcing their licensing conditions with respect to standards of safety and equipment maintenance.

The department survey found that six of the seven rides centres visited could not produce the relevant inspection and maintenance records which they are required to keep.

According to a USD official, centres which breach

their licensing conditions are given warning letters. If they still do not comply, they may face prosecution or suspension of their licence.

Statistics show, however, that no summonses have been issued to rides centres in the urban areas for breaches of licensing conditions.

According to Mr Tong, the present system of control ensures that only qualified people are appointed to uphold safety standards at the centres.

However, there are difficulties in ensuring they actually perform the duties they are required to.

Mr Tong said: "The USD has to rely on these competent persons, but who is to monitor the competent person's performance?"

"USD health inspectors can go and inspect a place,

but they are not technical people and they may not have the expertise to see if installations are all right or not."

Mr Tong said that under the proposed regulations, the control of children's rides centres would remain much the same as at present, except that the enforcement authority would be transferred to the Director of Electrical and Mechanical Services.

"The new regulations should not make much difference to the owners of these centres," Mr Tong said.

"Whether enforcement rests with the USD or with the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department, they will still have to employ qualified persons. The big difference is that monitoring will be more effective."