

GOLF CART SAFETY

By
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It's well into summer vacation and juvenile activity is on the rise! One of things most kids love to do when visiting grandparents, or just hanging around the house, is to ride the golf cart. Unfortunately this activity may be both dangerous and unlawful. Many residents believe that golf carts are legal to be operated anywhere and this is not the case. Florida State Statute 316.212 addresses the operation of golf carts on public roads and streets. In general the operation of golf carts on the street is prohibited however there are some notable exceptions to this statement. First, a county or municipality may designate certain roads for use by golf carts. Factors that play in the decision are the speed, volume and character of traffic on the road being considered. Statute 316.212 does allow the "reasonable operation of a golf cart...within any self-contained retirement community..." however there are safety provisions that must be taken into consideration under this statute as well. If a road is part of the State Highway System, usually carts may only cross that road, not operate on it and even then there are specific provisions that must be met.

Another place where golf cart operation is allowed is to cross a street or highway that divides a mobile home park however this would only apply to residents and guests of the park. In addition the place where golf carts cross must be approved by the governmental entity that has jurisdiction in that area.

A golf cart may be operated on a road that is part of the State Park Road System if the Division of Recreation and Parks of the Department of Environmental Protection has approved it and if the speed limit on that road is 35 miles per hour or less. If this is not enough, there are general provisions as to the time during which golf carts may be operated. Generally golf carts are only permitted to be operated on the road from sunrise to sunset. To operate

outside of these hours the cart must be equipped with headlights, brake lights, turn signals and a windshield. Also, similar to vehicles, golf carts must be equipped with efficient brakes, reliable steering apparatus, safe tires, a rearview mirror and red reflectorized warning devices in both the front and rear. In some applications it also must have a horn. I think this is the most important section of the golf cart statute and is one that parents and grandparents either don't know or don't want to know: A golf cart may not be operated on public roads or streets by any person under the age of 14. How many times have you seen a golf cart loaded to the hilt with children and no one is age 14 or older? I'll bet many times.

According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, about 13,000 golf cart related accidents require emergency room visits each year. Think about it – there are no seat belt requirements, no helmet requirements and no protection for people riding in or driving golf carts. Most injuries that I've seen in golf cart related accidents come as a result of being ejected from the cart. The driver will make an unexpected left turn and passengers are

unable to keep their balance in the cart. The onset of four wheeled carts has made overturning the cart more difficult but on uneven terrain this too is possible and dangerous.

The bottom line here is safety first. Allow only licensed adults to operate golf carts. Do not operate them in excess of 15 miles per hour and only drive during daylight hours. With this in mind, here's best wishes for a safe and enjoyable summer with your children and grandchildren!

