

UTILITY VEHICLE OPERATION & TRAINING BEST PRACTICES

Utility vehicles, often repurposed golf carts, are a common tool used by public agencies. Their convenience and flexibility make them essential to a facility's operations. They are often used to transport visitors and employees, carry maintenance and landscaping equipment, and even respond to first aid incidents and provide initial transport of injured or ill patients. While utility vehicles may appear harmless, it is important to realize they can be very dangerous when operated inappropriately and without adequate training.

The safe operation of utility vehicles starts with the employers selecting a model with the necessary capabilities. Golf carts were designed for two golfers traveling short distances with two sets of golf clubs. This capability may not be adequate for two employees, their power tools, bags of fertilizer, pails of paint, or similar heavy loads. When selecting a utility vehicle, employers should consider the weight-carrying capacity, tires, and suspension needed for the vehicle's intended use.

Utility vehicles are involved in many accidents each year that result in personal injury, death, and property damage. Several fatalities and serious injuries have occurred among New Jersey public employers in recent years. Utility vehicles may not have the stability, maneuverability, or safety features that make them susceptible to accidents. The following are some of the safety issues associated with utility vehicles:

- Due to their lightweight, high center of gravity, and small tires, they can easily tip over. They are even more prone to tipping over when used on rough, uneven, or sloped terrain.
- Many utility vehicles do not have seat belts or restraints for passengers and often have open sides. This increases the exposure of riders falling out of the car when in operation, which is the most common reason for injury and death.

While the design of utility vehicles may make them more prone to accidents, employers must realize that most accidents are preventable. Driver error is the leading cause of accidents. It is easy to underestimate the harm that can be done by a utility vehicle. It is also easy to believe if an employee has a driver's license, they can safely operate a utility vehicle. These are different skills and require different knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Only properly trained employees should operate a utility vehicle.

A comprehensive operating policy, training program, and driver selection process are essential to reducing accidents and injuries. To assist our members, the J.A. Montgomery Consulting has provided a model policy and training program at [Utility Cart Safety Model Program](#).

We encourage all employers to review the model policy and training forms. Alter them to suit your operations and consult your JIF Risk Control Consultant to assist or answer your questions.