

Horizontal Posts, Fence Boards, Etc. Are Unknown Roadside Dangers

Posting Date: 26 Mar 2011

Relativity is an interesting concept. In motor vehicle accident analysis the cause of accidents is sometimes relative to where you live. But the word "relativity" also suggests the word "relative" which can mean something belonging to the same family.

Recently a group of Kentucky medical researchers raised awareness to the issue that many of their badly injured motor vehicle accident patients died because of a similar cause. In the latest issue of the Journal of Forensic Science (misplaced somewhere in my office right now) these researchers noted that in Kentucky almost all roadside horse fields are fenced with a certain style of horizontal board. When vehicles travelled out-of-control into these fences the boards acted as "harpoons" that penetrated through the vehicle and stabbed the occupants. The researchers were so alarmed that they wondered about the frequency of these incidents in other parts of North America.

Well, there is this word called "relativity". Here in Southern Ontario we do not have very much of this style of board but we have certain horizontal harpoons that act just as effectively. While working with the University of Western Ontario Multi-Disciplinary Accident Research Team in the 1980s we reported on one instance on Highway 401 near Cambridge where a school bus passenger was "harpooned" by the top bar of a chain link fence as the school bus travelled out of control into the grass median (now replaced by a New Jersey Barrier). Since then I have tried to make people aware of the dangers very much like the Kentucky researchers. But sometimes we have a lot of wax in our ears.

But let me try again. Below are some photos taken within a kilometre or so of my office right next to two elementary (primary) schools where every morning there are numerous school buses travelling through and stopping.

Below is a photo of an unfinished metal-tube railing. In the background, across the street, is one of the two primary schools I was mentioning. This situation has existed for several weeks now.



Somehow the workers felt it would protect someone if they placed a bright orange "blanket" over the problem so it cannot be seen. But the photo below shows the extent to which the harpoon awaits the unknowing public.



Thousands of drivers and pedestrians pass this relatively busy road every day but I am sure no one recognized the danger.

This particular railing will likely harpoon passenger cars and pick-up trucks or vans. But there is another chain link fence across the road that I have not been able to photograph yet which is the tall one similar to what harpooned the school bus passenger that I discussed on Highway 401.

Below is a photo taken from just the other side of the small bridge where I took the photos of the incomplete railing. Here we see another harpoon.



This time the workers were considerate enough to spray some orange paint on the end of the harpoon. Like an invisible force field this orange paint is going to deflect any wayward, out-of-control, 2000 pound vehicles away from the harpoon. OK, maybe I am becoming too sarcastic. But it is frustrating to see these things on a regular basis.