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Seattle Times

Seattle, Washington, US

Wednesday, September 30, 2026

Page 5, Section: | News A

680 words, 44in² in size

197,772 circulation



Magic Mountain closes X2 coaster permanently after history of injuries

By FEDOR ZARKHIN
Los Angeles Times

LOS ANGELES — Six Flags Magic Mountain's famous X2 roller-coaster ride is permanently closed, after a history of injuries, including some that led to deaths, park officials announced Tuesday.

The ride was first closed temporarily in July after reports of back-to-back brain injuries.

"While X2 consistently passed a multitude of safety tests, we have decided to close the ride because we believe it's the right thing to do," Brian Oerding, Six Flags Magic Mountain president, said in a statement. "Ride safety is a cornerstone of our business, and when we see

guest confidence affected, we take it seriously."

Months after the ride, first called X, opened in 2002, it had to be closed to repair design flaws. Then, in 2007, it was closed again to replace the trains with lighter ones and reopened the next year as X2. It has long been one of the park's main attractions, featuring seats that spin forward and backward 360 degrees. More than 16 million people have ridden X2, Magic Mountain said in its statement.

Anne Hawley, whose son died in 2022 after riding X2, was emotional Tuesday morning after learning the ride was permanently closed. Christopher Hawley was 22

when he rode X2, stumbled after getting off it, lost consciousness and died shortly thereafter. His family sued Magic Mountain and settled the case in August.

"We have tried for four years to do the best we can to spread awareness," Hawley said. "They finally listened."

Hawley was just one of several people who have sued Magic Mountain in connection with brain injuries.

Hilda Farias was 28 when she rode X2 in 2010 and developed a brain bleed that led to her death, according to court records. Sheila Katereles claimed in another suit that she suffered a traumatic brain injury in 2020 after

riding X2. Lucy Alvarez claimed in a third suit that she sustained a traumatic brain injury in 2021 after riding X2, causing her "great physical, mental and nervous pain and suffering."

X2 had long been hailed by ride enthusiasts for its design. The seats are on the side of the track, allowing riders' feet to dangle below or above them as their seat spins forward or backward. At the beginning, riders are taken up a slope while facing backward and, at the peak, their seats spin forward as they hurtle toward the ground headfirst.

CNN reported in August that X2 has been linked to more than a dozen reports of serious injuries and hospitalizations over the last two decades, including the deaths of Hawley and Farias. The report said two people

suffered brain hemorrhages in July after riding X2, requiring surgical intervention.

Martin Lewison, a roller-coaster enthusiast and a professor at Farmingdale State College in New York who's known for riding thousands of coasters around the world, said that while X2's closure was "a sad day for the coaster enthusiast world," he believed that if the ride has caused injuries and opened the company to legal risk, it made sense for Magic Mountain to close it. Lewison is a Six Flags shareholder.

Concerns about injuries on roller coasters have spanned decades.

A report by The Times in 2001 noted several studies suggested specific brain injuries were linked to thrill rides, though the data, The Times noted, was inconclu-

sive. That same year, a rider on Magic Mountain's Goliath coaster died of a brain aneurysm. The Los Angeles County coroner concluded the ride did not cause the aneurysm "but only caused a rupture of a preexisting, severe and fragile aneurysm." The rider's family later sued.

Magic Mountain is set to open the Thrill Glider next year, a roller coaster featuring a "suspended glider train design combined with over half a mile of twisting, turning, diving track built into the park's unique mountain-side," Six Flags wrote in its statement announcing the coaster's construction.

"Where else than at the Thrill Capital of the World would you expect to find a next-generation, first-of-its-kind coaster?" the company wrote.