

## **WATCH OUT FOR CONS ON THE CARNIVAL MIDWAY**

Summer means county fairs, traveling carnival shows, and lots of fun. But watch out for midway amusement games where you can lose more than a little pocket change to con artists.

Many amusement games can be easily rigged by the operator. Some game operators will allow someone to win to encourage others to play and then fix the game so no one else wins. A great deal of money can be generated in a gullible crowd.

For example, one popular game is the pop bottle roll. Two pop bottles are placed side-by-side. The object of the game is to roll a softball down the platform and knock over both bottles with one ball. The only way the player can win is to hit the bottles directly in the center, hitting both bottles at the same time. But the game operator can assure a losing roll by offsetting one of the bottles. The ball will hit one of the bottles first, which will absorb most of the ball's energy. There is not enough force left in the roll of the ball to knock over the other bottle. Plus, the softball the player is given to use is not a regulation ball.

Another game is the "pin game," which requires players to roll two balls down a small wooden bowling alley. Five pins are set at the end of the alley -- two staggered behind the other three. Because of the spacing of the pins and the size of the balls being rolled, no player can knock down more than two pins each roll. A pin will always be left standing, and you will always lose. When unscrupulous operators demonstrate the game, they nonchalantly knock down the fifth pin with a brush of their hand as they are following through with the roll.

Another game requires players to toss a ball into a slanted peach basket to win a prize. The construction of the basket makes it nearly impossible to keep a tossed ball inside. When operators demonstrate the game to encourage others to play, they place a spare ball in the basket to deaden the bounce created by the bottom of the basket. The game is easy to win then. But the spare ball is always taken out when you try to play.

Not all midway games are rigged, but some are. Experts say a good rule of thumb is to avoid games that seem too easy and have a big, stuffed animal as a prize. You should also be suspicious if the game operator gives you some free tries, and you win. But then when you pay, you always lose. Walk away before you go broke.

Play group games where you are competing against other players and not the operator. Games like the water balloon race always have a winner. The size of the prize often depends on the number of players competing, but at least you have the same chance of winning as the other players.

Midway games must be conducted in an honest, fair manner. If you believe you have been bilked, contact your local county sheriff's department immediately.