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N.C. aids park's safety efforts

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MAGGIE VALLEY - The ownership of Ghost Town in the Sky on Friday entered into a partnership with the N.C. Department of Labor sanctioning state inspectors to monitor each step of theme park's renovations for safety.

Under the agreement, inspectors will make visits over the next 98 days to the Ghost Town property and to the work site of the ride remanufacturer in Knoxville to ensure all facilities and equipment are up to state code before the May 25 scheduled reopening of the park.

"Everything you see when you go up there will be new or repaired and replaced down to the bare metal," said Tommy Petty, N.C. Department of Labor supervisor for the western region of the state.

Petty said his department had to shut down Ghost Town's chairlift and incline tram as well as some rides near the end of the park's previous ownership because the equipment was worn out and unsafe.

When the park was constructed in the 1960s, he said the state had very few codes that addressed amusement park equipment standards. Today, state law requires amusement park equipment to meet 100 percent of the manufacturer's specifications in order to open in North Carolina.

The N.C. Amusement Device and Safety Act lays out the strictest safety standards for amusement parks in the country, according to Cherie Berry, Department of Labor commissioner.

She praised Ghost Town's ownership for partnering with the state to ensure a safe reopening for the park.

Berry said the partnership is the first of its kind in the nation.

"When it's all said and done and on May 25 when it opens to the public, we want to make sure that the public can build those happy memories and enjoy this wonderful, wonderful facility in a safe and healthy manner," Berry said.

Ghost Town's new owner, Hank Woodburn, said he consulted with state inspectors from the beginning, requesting their input about previous problems involving the park's chairlift and some of the rides before buying the park.

Before the reopening he said workers would X-ray the roller coaster and fit it with new controls and sensors, add a new top and bottom station for the chair lift and complete a host of other renovations.