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Recreational Park Trailers

History Of A Product Undergoing Positive Changes

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Recreational Park Trailers

A Product Undergoing Positive Change

Description And Overview

Recreational Park Trailers sited in RV Parks and Resorts are providing the American family with an affordable way to own a seasonal - camping unit in a recreational - resort setting. The national trade association representing the manufacturers and suppliers producing Recreational Park Trailers (RPTLA) defines these products in the Association's bylaws as follows:

A Recreational Park Trailer is a recreational vehicle that is primarily designed to provide temporary living quarters for recreation, camping or seasonal use; built on a single chassis; mounted on wheels; which has a gross trailer area not exceeding 400 square feet in the set-up mode and is certified by the manufacturer as complying with ANSI A119.5.

Over 200,000 of these compact seasonal dwellings have been placed into RV Parks and Resorts at recreational locations throughout the US and Canada. Adding to this growing inventory are annual sales of approximately 10,000 additional units.

This brochure has been produced to provide the camping industry, financial entities, government officials and allied organizations a closer look at Recreational Park Trailers. It details how and why the product was originally created and tells what it has become. It reveals how Recreational Park Trailers are being used, who the owners are, and where these units are being placed. It also describes a plan to change the formal definition of the Recreational Park Trailer, removing its status as a traditional RV while retaining its right to be sold by RV Dealers and sited in RV Parks. The brochure also gives a projection as to the product's future.

Background

How Recreational Park Trailers originated

Originating as a segment of the RV industry, this "cottage on wheels" was first produced during the late 60's as the longest and most spacious of the towable RV trailers. The unit was designed to be pulled behind the family's full sized car or light-duty truck. Typically, the trailer was 8 feet in width and was limited by most state highway laws to 30 or 32

feet in length. It was equipped with sleeping and living areas, water supply, plumbing, heating, food storage and preparation facilities. On-board power and waste containment systems provided the occupants with light, heat, refrigeration, cooking and sanitary needs for one night or perhaps two, of self-contained camping or for longer periods when hooked-up to the on-site utilities provided in a campground or RV resort.

A special expandability feature was often provided for these units after they became sited. The trailer was equipped with room expanders that either slid out on rails or were tipped out from the trailer body. When fully expanded, the size of the living space was increased to nearly 400 square feet. Owners of these units usually set them up in campgrounds where utility connections were temporarily made to access the park's water, electricity and sewer services. The on-site utility hookups made it possible to accommodate a longer stay that would otherwise exceed the trailer's self-containment capacities.

These larger trailers, like all RVs produced after 1964, were required to be built to conform with the national safety standard created through the consensus development process of the American National Standards Institute (ANSI). The Standard ANSI A119.2 for Recreation Vehicles was adopted as law by 15 states and was mandated as a condition of affiliation by the national trade association, RVIA (Recreation Vehicle Industry Association), which represented this product as a recognized segment of the Association during this period.

The Energy Crisis Impacts the ability to tow

America became entangled in an energy crisis in 1973-74 and again in 1979-80, that caused our nation to reconsider its unquenchable appetite for energy and our resulting dependency on foreign oil. Programs to bring about imposed conservation became the law of the land. Congress passed mandatory fuel mileage standards which vehicle manufacturers had to achieve or be subject to extensive fines. This law caused a reduction in the size and power of the then typical household vehicle. Also affected was the towing capability needed to move the larger trailers, as the downsized vehicles were no longer powerful enough to handle this task in a safe manner.

Despite the rapidly diminishing number of tow

vehicles, America's love affair with these larger camping units continued and an innovative solution was formulated. Instead of towing these larger Recreational Park Trailers between the campsite and home, the unit was moved into a lot at an RV resort or campground and an arrangement was made to either rent or lease the location on a seasonal basis. Here the term "Park Trailer" was first used to describe these units.

For most Recreational Park Trailer owners the arrangement was the best of both worlds. It gave them an inexpensive cottage on location at a favorite resort and eliminated the need to transport and store the trailer at home.

Federal Law Affects Park Trailer Width

The federal government became active in regulating manufactured homes in the mid-70's by mandating a national HUD construction code for the factory-produced residential homes. When initially passed in 1976, Congress determined that manufactured homes included all dwelling units with a width that exceeded 8 feet and a length that exceeded 32 feet. The new law and its regulations had very little impact on Recreational Park Trailers since nearly all of the units being produced at that time were slightly smaller than the law's threshold dimensions.

Congress revised the law in 1980. The definition of a manufactured home was now based upon the size of the unit when erected on site with 320 square feet being established as the threshold size. When this change was proposed, Congress found that this new definition inadvertently included many of the Recreational Park Trailers - units that were sized between 320 and 400 square feet when erected on site. Congress acknowledged that there were differences between these seasonal-vacation dwelling units and the full time residential manufactured homes. Thus they suggested that HUD (Department of Housing and Urban Development) take these differences under advisement and directed that the HUD Secretary establish special regulations to address the unique needs and requirements of the Recreational Park Trailers.

HUD considered the unique use of the Recreational Park Trailers and determined by regulation that the units sized between 320 and 400 square feet, which were designed and intended for seasonal or recreational use, would be excluded from having to meet the requirements of the HUD Standard for Manufactured Homes.

The agency initially required that these exempted recreational units had to be built with properties of full self-containment, including electrical generators and that they were to be of such a size that they would not require special highway movement permits. HUD eventually concluded that Recreational Park Trailers would be exempt as long as they did not exceed the 400 gross square feet of living space when erected on site, thus eliminating the previously mandated width and self-containment parameters. Revised in 1983, this exemption remains a HUD regulation today.

Increased Width Eagerly Accepted

HUD's 1983 deletion of the self-containment and highway movement requirements allowed the Recreational Park Trailer industry to begin producing wider products. Units with spans of up to 12 or more feet were typically offered to the consumers. The additional width also served to eliminate the necessity of providing slide-outs or tip-outs to gain the extra square footage.

The wider units also took on a new look, with designs that often included peak roofs, traditional shingles, overhangs, recessed doorways, bay windows or other features that were typically found on traditional site-built cottages.

The original 8 feet wide Recreational Park Trailers (now up to 8 feet 6 inches in width) with slides, tip-outs and self-containment features are still being produced to accommodate owners who wish to retain the highway-mobility feature. This product remains defined as a Recreational Park Trailer by virtue of its size, between 320 and 400 square feet when erected on site.

Park Trailer Safety Standard Created

As the new and wider Recreational Park Trailer evolved, it also became apparent that changes in the national standard for RV safety would be needed to address the longer terms of on-site usage. A new consensus Standard was created to address these changes and was adopted by the American National Standards Institute in 1983 as the ANSI--A-119.5 Park Trailer Standard.

The Recreational Park Trailer Standard covers some 500 specific requirements and is scheduled for frequent revisions to insure that it keeps pace with advances in technology. This nationally recognized standard is acknowledged within the judicial structure of all states. In addition, seven states maintain

programs of inspection and enforcement. As with the previous RV Standard, the national trade association that represented the manufacturers building these units mandated that their members pledge compliance with the Standard.

Park Trailer Association Established

The creation of Recreational Park Trailers exceeding 8 1/2 feet in width meant that some of the units being produced were no longer intended, nor designed, for daily travel on the highways. Even the Recreational Park Trailers that remained road ready (less than 8 1/2 feet in width) were being used more frequently as seasonal dwellings in RV Parks. This change of usage for the Recreational Park Trailer created a difference of opinion as to what the national association that represented both the traditional RVs and the Recreational Park Trailers should or could do to effectively address their independent needs. Unfortunately, the traditional RV interests and the interests of the Recreational Park Trailer segment were not always compatible. These differences fanned an internal movement within the organization to establish two separate associations. As time passed, the movement grew and eventually became a reality.

The actual division between the two groups started in the summer of 1993 and was completed in October 1994. RVIA continued to represent the more mobile RVs (no longer including Recreational Park Trailers) and the new trade association - Recreational Park Trailer Industry Association (RPTIA) was established to exclusively represent Recreational Park Trailer interests. RPTIA was established quickly. Bylaws were written, a Board of Directors was elected, and a new standards inspection and enforcement program was put in place. Efforts to continue the important process of revising the A119.5 Park Trailer Standard were established. RVIA supported and assisted the new Recreational Park Trailer Association in its formation and both associations continue to enjoy good working relationships that allow them to address the many issues where mutual concerns occur.

New Park Trailer Definition Proposed

Many industry members were concerned about the possibility that Recreational Park Trailers might no longer be defined as RVs without RVIA's affiliation. Their concerns were based upon the knowledge that RV dealers - licensed only to sell RVs,

were selling Recreational Park Trailers. (Would this right to sell Recreational Park Trailers be threatened?) They were also concerned that the Recreational Park Trailer owners might meet with resistance from RV Parks or the local zoning and planning officials who regulate land use and Recreational Park Trailer placement if the Recreational Park Trailer were defined as something other than an RV. (Would a definition change impact the number of available or future sites for Recreational Park Trailers?) A solution needed to be found. Hopefully, it would be possible to make a change in the definition without disrupting the future of the Recreational Park Trailer. To examine the possibilities and recommend a solution, a Joint Committee was formed between the RPTIA, RVIA and ARVC (National Association of RV Resorts and Campgrounds).

In an effort to fully understand how the changes under consideration might impact the industry, RPTIA compiled a survey from the RV dealerships that market Recreational Park Trailers. The study, conducted in June of 1994, reported on the preceding twelve months of sales and gathered information detailing where these units were being sited and what their intended use was going to be. Dealerships from 96 locations representing nearly every state, responded to the study, giving information that covered the placement of 2,961 Recreational Park Trailers sold during the year.

The results confirmed that the majority of the Recreational Park Trailers were being placed into RV Parks and Resorts. 79% of these units were placed into existing parks (parks over five years old) with an additional 15% going into parks that were new (less than five years old). An additional 3% were being purchased by the parks and were used as guest rental units owned by park management. In total, 97% of the units sold were being placed into RV Parks and Resorts. The balance of the Recreational Park Trailers, only 3%, were being sited on private property.

When detailing how the new owners intended to use their new Recreational Park Trailers, 88% of the responding dealerships stated that these units were destined to be used as exclusive owner-occupied seasonal dwellings.

ANSI Standards To Reflect Changes

The Joint Committee considered the issues and proposed that the definition of industry products be

carefully restructured. They suggested that all products used in RV resorts or campgrounds should be defined as camping units. Included in the camping unit definition would be tents, teepees, yurts, housekeeping cabins, camping cabins, Recreational Park Trailers and recreation vehicles, each with a separate definition. It was also proposed that these definition changes would be used in all of the industry Standards: ANSI A119.2 for Recreation Vehicles, A119.4 for RV Parks and Campgrounds, and in A119.5 for Recreational Park Trailers. This concept was found acceptable to the three associations. The proposed changes in the definition of Recreational Park Trailers, redefining them as camping units instead of recreation vehicles, was submitted to the independent ANSI A119.2 (RV Standard) - A119.4 (RV Park Standard) Committee. The ANSI committee reviewed these recommendations and decided to adopt the individual definitions of the various products used in campgrounds but did not feel comfortable with the term "Camping Units" as the overall defining term. As an alternative to using the term "Camping Units," they used the term "RVs, Recreational Park Trailers and Camping Units" throughout the Standard to describe the units being placed into RV Parks. This definition continued until a subsequent revision to the A119.4 took place in 1997, which adopted the original proposal to have all products used in an RV Park defined as camping units with individual definitions.

Future Looks Bright

The industry will provide the leadership that will bring about the proposed definition changes for Recreational Park Trailers without difficulty. RPTIA will be working with government agencies to insure that the product retains its rightful place in the camping industry. The industry anticipates that Recreational Park Trailers will continue their growing presence in the campgrounds and RV resorts and will capture an even larger segment of the vacation and leisure time lifestyle. To assist the industry in gaining consumer exposure for its unique product and lifestyle, RPTIA has created a significant public relations effort that includes a high profile with both the trade and public media, as well as an extensive website detailing information of value to our potential owners, members of the media and government. Together, these efforts are assisting America's families discover that Recreational Park Trailers sited in an RV Park or Resort offer a most attractive and affordable lifestyle that will meet or exceed a family's recreational and vacation needs.