



LEIA Safety Information Sheet

Misuse of Lifts

LEIA Safety and Environment Committee

SAFETY INFORMATION SHEET

MISUSE OF LIFTS

PREAMBLE

This Information Sheet is one of a series produced by the LEIA Safety and Environment Committee on topics relevant to the UK Lift and Escalator Industry. Whilst every effort has been taken in the production of these sheets, it must be acknowledged that they should be read in conjunction with the relevant legislation, codes of practice etc. They should not be taken as an authoritative interpretation of the law but a guidance to it.

INTRODUCTION

The LEIA safety committee have over recent years become aware of many hazardous situations reported to us by our members which involve the misuse of lifts and similar equipment.

Very often such misuse is not malicious but nevertheless often puts both the perpetrator and others in the building at risk of serious harm.

It is the intention of this safety information sheet to highlight instances of misuse to make lift owners aware of what can happen and how well intentioned actions by their employees can put persons at extreme risk.

Ultimately the responsibility for the safety of any equipment, such as lifts and escalators located in a building rests with the owner or person in control of that building.

The general duties imposed by The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 and the detail in supporting regulations mean owners are obliged to keep equipment in a safe condition and provide information, instruction and training to those using that equipment.

Typically the use of a passenger lift does not require much training, but training of your staff as to how to proceed when the lift malfunctions is critically important to ensure those faced with a non-functioning lift or trapped passengers do not improvise with well-meaning but tragic results. It is the intention of this safety information sheet to highlight instances of misuse to make lift owners aware of what can happen and how well intentioned actions by their employees can put persons at extreme risk.

The following are real life photographs – nothing has been simulated - and press reports of accidents.

Please read this information sheet in the spirit it is intended – to keep you and anyone within your building safe and free from harm and to prevent tragedies.

Examples of misuse encountered by LEIA Members



Misuse of Door release Key

The landing door had been opened by customer's staff with the release key and wedged open.

Risk: Potentially fatal falls from height and indicative of landing door emergency release keys not being kept securely and available to untrained and unauthorised staff.



Misuse of Door release Key

A landing door had been opened with the release key allowing access to pit area beneath the lift platform. In this example persons entered the pit thinking they were getting onto the platform and when the landing door closed and locked the platform above started to descend. Fortunately the landing door was forced open and the descent stopped. Persons beneath could have been crushed – as it was they were traumatised.

Risk: Potentially fatal crushing injuries.

Example of failure to control access to door release keys and adequately train staff.



Interference with electrical supply and electrical protection

Client staff had by-passed fuses allowing the lift to operate after a malfunction.

Risk: Electric shock and fire.

Example of lack of understanding of electrical principles and training of staff



Misuse of Safety Mechanisms

Landing door lock wedged with cardboard – in this condition the lift would run up and down with the landing door open.

Risk: Falls into the shaft and/ or contact with moving lift car either of which could have resulted in a fatality.

Indicative of poor local management, irresponsible behaviour, lack of training resulting in poor awareness of dangers involved.

THE SCOTSMAN
Wed 21 Sep 2005

print  close 

Hotel chain is fined £400,000 over death of man in lift plunge

VALERIE MACGREGOR

A HOTEL group which failed to act on 30 recommendations to upgrade a lift was yesterday fined £400,000 after a trapped guest fell to his death.

Edinburgh Sheriff Court heard that the UK managing director of the electrical engineering company Kanthal became trapped in an antiquated lift in the city's Learmonth Hotel.

When Richard Fareham, 61, began to feel anxious and claustrophobic, he tried to lower himself out of the lift cage to the nearest floor but his body weight pulled him into the shaft and he fell.

Fiscal Depute Laura Thomson told the court that Mr Fareham had checked into the hotel, owned by the chain Ramada Jarvis, on 14 September, 2003. He was due to give a talk at a conference there the following day.

Forty minutes later he telephoned reception from his mobile phone complaining that the lift had stopped and the lights had gone out. When an engineer said he would take up to 30 minutes to arrive, staff attempted to rescue Mr Fareham, from Stafford, themselves.

A manager cut and restarted the power supply several times in a bid to start the mechanism. She said an engineer had previously shown her how to do this.

She later told investigating health and safety officers: "There were so many problems that if we called an engineer every time the lift played up, the engineer would have had to have lived in the hotel."

While the power was cut, Mr Fareham, who said he needed fresh air, managed to force open the lift doors. He was stuck 1.5 meters above the second floor and attempted to climb out of the cage. Lying on his stomach he slid his feet towards the second floor, but slipped underneath the lift and fell into the gap. He died from multiple injuries.

Mrs Thomson told Sheriff Isabella McColl that different maintenance companies had recommended that the antiquated lift control system be upgraded no fewer than 30 times before the fatality.

Engineers blamed the 20-year-old control system and recommended in 25 service-visit reports that it be replaced or upgraded. The engineers' head office gave the same advice another two times while another adviser made the recommendation three more times.

When a Jarvis manager was later asked why the work had not been done before the accident, he said: "As a commercial company with difficult trading conditions, funds are not always available for all required works ... on time."

Advisers deemed that another obsolete lift in a Kent hotel owned by Jarvis required more urgent attention.

Health and safety experts ruled that if a steel apron had been fitted underneath the cage of the elevator, which is standard in modern lifts, it would have caught Mr Fareham.

The company pleaded guilty to breaching two health and safety regulations, one of failing to adequately train staff and one of failing to provide a sufficient risk assessment.

Defence counsel Gerald Hanretty, QC, said Jarvis advisers had not brought home the full danger of the lift. "This is not an example of turning a blind eye. The group did intend to fully modernise the lift but it did not do so in time," he said.

And he stressed that if Mr Fareham had stayed within the elevator he almost certainly would have been saved by a repair engineer.



Misuse by untrained staff attempting release of trapped passengers

Risk: Potentially fatal injury from falls from height or crushing injury in the event of sudden movement of the car

Evidence of failure to adequately train staff – the staff had not been trained in passenger release and their well-intentioned efforts to release a trapped passenger resulted in his death.



Council fined for lift shaft fall at Liberton High School

25 February 2014 | Edinburgh, Fife & East Scotland



BBC

A local authority has been fined £8,000 after a pupil fell down a lift shaft at an Edinburgh school following a failed rescue attempt.

Morgan Seaton, a fourth year Liberton High School pupil, was 15 at the time of the accident on 8 December 2011.

She dropped more than 5m (15ft) to the bottom of the shaft, suffering three fractured vertebrae, bruising to her back and a sprained wrist.

Edinburgh City Council plead guilty to a breach of health and safety at work.

At Edinburgh Sheriff Court the council was charged with failing to make a suitable assessment of the risks to the health and safety of persons not in their employment who used the lift at Liberton High School and failing to provide sufficient information, instruction, training and supervision to employees in what to do if someone was trapped in a lift.

When four pupils became trapped in a lift between floors, members of staff went to their rescue, but their "well-intentioned efforts" resulted in one of the children, Miss Seaton, falling through the gap between the bottom of the lift and the floor level, into the lift shaft.

She spent two days in the Royal Infirmary and did not return to school for another two weeks.

The girl suffered pain in her back when sitting for long periods and this caused her difficulty when studying for her Standard Grade exams.

Misuse by untrained staff attempting release of trapped passengers

Risk: Injury from falls from height or crushing injury in the event of sudden movement of the car

Evidence of failure to adequately train staff – the staff had not been trained in passenger release and their well-intentioned efforts to release a trapped passenger resulted in a young girl falling and sustaining injuries.

Pontcanna care home owners fined £100k for lift death

12 August 2015 | South East Wales



PROSECUTING AUTHORITY CARDIFF COUNCIL

The owners of a care home where an elderly lady fell down a lift shaft and died have been ordered to pay £100,000.

May Lewis, 96, was killed after falling 20ft (6m) at Pontcanna House Care Home in Cardiff in 2012.

Carer Carol Conway, who walked backwards into the lift with Mrs Lewis in a wheelchair, also sustained life-threatening injuries.

On Tuesday, Shirwan and Nasik Al-Mufti admitted two serious health and safety breaches at Cardiff Crown Court.

The court heard the lift had been locked due to a fault but an emergency key was regularly used by staff to manually open the doors which would override the safety features.

Ms Conway had waited for the bell to sound but the platform for the lift had not arrived and the pair fell down two floors.

Prosecuting, Cardiff council said both Mr and Mrs Dr Al-Mufti were legally responsible for the safety of their staff and residents.

The court was told health and safety fell below the expected standards, that Mr and Mrs Dr Al-Mufti failed to adhere to warnings that the emergency key should not be used and they failed to have adequate risk assessments or training for their staff to use the lift.

Misuse of Door Release Key

Door release key was regularly used to open landing doors. Local management failed to adequately control the door release keys allowing care staff to access the shaft without the lift platform in place. This resulted in life-threatening injuries to the carer and a fatality to an elderly lady.

Example of failure to control access to door release keys and adequately train staff.

The Nightingale club fined £10,000 after employee falls 13 FEET down a lift shaft and breaks their back

Owners of the Nightingale on Kent Street appeared at Birmingham Magistrates' Court on Wednesday



By Alison Stacey
06.30, 2 NOV 2017

NEWS

Owners of a Birmingham nightclub have been fined £10,000 after a member of staff plummeted 13 feet down a lift shaft and broke their back.

The employee at The Nightingale was loading a storage frame into the lift when they fell four metres down the hole and suffered serious injuries.

Owners of The Nightingale (UK) Limited pleaded guilty to one offence under the Health and Safety Act at Birmingham Magistrates' Court following a prosecution by Birmingham City Council.

They were also ordered to pay court costs of £6,251.15 plus a £120 victim surcharge.

The court heard that the lift had been taken out of use on the 28 July 2016 because of a fault with the middle door release, by sending it to the top floor and activating the stop button.

Two days later an employee used a screwdriver to operate the emergency door release so stock could be taken down in the lift.

During the fourth trip the lift did not arrive at the landing, but a member of staff carrying a frame walked into the space and fell four metres down the shaft.

The company argued that the lift had been used by staff against company rules to take stock downstairs.

However, it accepted it did not do enough to prevent use of the lift by electrically isolating it.

The council said that the nightclub owners co-operated with the investigation and had now instructed a contractor to maintain the lift and ensured its employees had received adequate training following the incident.

Councillor Barbara Dring, Chair of the city council's Licensing and Public Protection Committee, said: "This case shows what can happen if a business fails to ensure that suitable systems and control measures are in place, particularly if failing to do so could result in serious or life changing injuries.

"Falls from height are well known to cause serious or fatal injuries.

"Officers will continue to take action where minimum standards of health and safety are not met or flouted."

Misuse by staff improvising means of access.

The press report states this was a lift intended for access by disabled persons so may not have been suitable for the movement of stock.

Failure to maintain lift in a safe condition and failure to adequately train staff resulting in improvisation.



Misuse of Safety Mechanisms

Landing door lock wedged with cardboard – in this condition the lift would run up and down with the landing door open.

Risk: Falls into the shaft and/ or contact with moving lift car either of which could have resulted in a fatality.

Indicative of poor local management, irresponsible behaviour, lack of training resulting in poor awareness of dangers involved.

SUMMARY

These are a few examples of the misuse of lift machinery and procedures found by LEIA Members. These are not isolated incidents and there are many others.

LEIA urges lift owners and managers to review their procedures and to effectively train staff to not misuse the potentially hazardous lift machinery, endangering their own lives, their colleagues lives and the lives of members of the public.

REFERENCES

<https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/nightingale-club-fined-10000-after-13845916>

<https://www.scotsman.com/news/hotel-chain-is-fined-163-400-000-over-death-of-man-in-lift-plunge-1-1096856>

<https://www.blackpoolgazette.co.uk/news/blackpool-mum-and-daughter-in-lift-crush-drama-1-7507147>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-edinburgh-east-fife-26344369>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-south-east-wales-33880486>