

## Facilities Management from A to Z

Based on The FM Lexicon by Martin Pickard  
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# Lifts

Many buildings contain have lifts or escalators, but because they are such a commonplace item of equipment, it is easy to neglect the dangers they pose and the need for correct selection, installation and maintenance that they require. It is important to note that the term 'lift' can cover many forms of device for lifting people, including passenger lifts, mobile elevated working platforms, paternoster lifts, scissor-lift platforms and suspended cradles. The requirements for lifts and hoists not intended for the use of people are similar, with somewhat lesser requirements, but still of great importance.

When considering the risk involved with lifts and escalators it is important to remember that they are designed to lift large weights against gravity. The power required is quite capable of causing severe injury to a person with an inappropriately placed limb or part of the body. The guillotine effect resulting from of inadequate safety procedures relating to lift doors can lead to limb amputation or worse.

Many lift users worry about the possibility of the lift going into freefall because of a broken cable. Although this is theoretically possible, legislation requires that the design and construction of lifts have sufficient means to prevent the danger of broken lifting cables and to mitigate the worst of the effects should this actually occur. However, as with any item of work equipment, the means of controlling the risk is only suitable and sufficient if the risks have been properly assessed and controlled.

Far more common is the problem of people getting stuck in lifts that have broken down. The HSE advice on "Emergency release of passengers from immobilised lifts" available on [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk) emphasises the importance of ensuring that proper arrangements exist for raising the alarm and for summoning competent help. It is vitally important that training, instructions and systems for carrying out such rescues are regularly tested and maintained. The time taken to free people from a lift is an inconvenience rather than a hazard. However, there might be special circumstances where passengers who are ill, infirm, aged or suffering from claustrophobia are involved. While getting them out quickly is desirable, safety should not be sacrificed for speed.

The rescue should only be carried out by authorised persons who have received the necessary instruction. It is obviously very dangerous for any one else to attempt it. Failing to take adequate precautions may render the authorised person concerned guilty of negligence if an accident occurs.

Training and operations should be carried out according to the manufacturer's instructions for the lift concerned. They will vary wildly so the rescuer must have been trained in the use of that specific lift. Some will require manual winding with the power off, others have emergency electrical winding systems and hydraulic lifts are different again.

*A useful organisation for general information on the selection and use of lifts and escalators is the Lift and Escalator Industry Association [www.leia.co.uk](http://www.leia.co.uk)*