RISK CONTROL BULLETIN

Escalators

Escalators are known for service, for transporting the public to the tune of 10 million passenger-miles per day, and sometimes for causing injuries. On average escalators cause an estimated 20 accidents per day, often of a serious nature. Most are slip/trip/pushed/lost balance falls. Falls are also caused by sudden malfunctions, horseplay, and from congestion at the bottom as people try to get off. Other serious accidents result when hands, shoes, and clothing get caught between the side of a moving step-riser and the stationary side panel (skirt). This exposure is especially hazardous for young children and sneaker-wearers, and has led to mangling/amputation of toes and fingers and even strangulation from a jacket drawstring.

Engineering improvements have minimized these occurrences, including safety side plates that fill in the entrapment gap between the step-riser and skirt, but many escalators were installed before their availability and may need retrofitting. Even with the use of the safety side plates, signage should advise adults to hold a child's hand, as well as the customary other admonitions. Reaching for the handrail brings the moving child dangerously close to the stationary side panel and edge of step-riser.

What remains is routine maintenance and supervision. An escalator service company should be used for periodic inspections and repairs, but a vigilant supervisor can do even more, on a daily basis including:

- Spotting damaged, dirty, worn, or slippery step treads, grooves, floor plates, and handrails as well as malpositioned or missing comb plate teeth.
- Ensuring compliance with signage and courteous behavior in the use of the escalator, watching for horseplay, strollers, etc.
- Implementing customary and emergency crowd control procedures, especially during periods of heavy use.
- Physically barring escalator use when inoperative, except as required for emergency egress.

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