

Modernise lifts to boost safety, urges BCA

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Policemen at the scene where an elderly woman's hand was found outside the lift by Singapore Civil Defence Force rescuers at Tah Ching Road. PHOTO: LIANHE WANBAO

It lists recommended features that lift owners can implement to improve reliability and performance

The Building and Construction Authority (BCA) is urging lift owners to modernise their lifts for greater reliability and performance.

To aid this voluntary move, the BCA has drawn up a list of recommended features.

These safety-improving features include a battery-powered automatic rescue device that can bring a lift to the nearest landing and open the doors if there is a power failure.

Said BCA chief executive officer John Keung: "The BCA will be issuing an advisory to lift owners and the industry, and we encourage all lift owners to consider lift modernisation to further improve the standard of existing lifts in Singapore."

There are about 61,000 passenger lifts here, including about 24,000 in public housing estates.

In response to queries, a Housing Board spokesman said: "The BCA's recommended list of modernisation items to enhance the performance of older lifts will be applied to HDB lifts as well."

The Ministry of National Development and the HDB will announce the details next week.

Asked why the move was not mandatory, a BCA spokesman noted that many lifts already have some recommended features such as the automatic rescue device.

"Existing lifts, with proper use, regular maintenance and inspections, are safe to use. However, they can be further enhanced to make them more reliable and improve their performance," he added.

The BCA's list of features is based on industry consultation and benchmarked against safety standards, taking into account findings from lift audit checks and recent lift incidents here and abroad.

An international panel of experts supported the idea of voluntary modernisation and the list of items.

Industry players said the recommended features are common in newer lifts, but may be hard to install in lifts older than 20 years.

Lifts installed since 2009 have to comply with official standards that prescribe some of these features, noted Ken-Jo Industries managing director Kenneth Lim. For older lifts, the ease of retrofitting varies by feature, he said, adding: "You need to see whether the structure and the design make it feasible."

Dr Lai Weng Chuen, a committee member of the Singapore Lift & Escalator Contractors & Manufacturers Association, said it might be better to simply replace very old lifts.

"Sometimes, the cost (of retrofitting) may be so prohibitive that it makes sense to overhaul," he said.

Property manager AsiaMalls Management confirmed that its lifts already have four of the eight recommended features. It is checking whether its lifts also comply with the remaining four.

"We work closely with the BCA and are committed to working in partnership with them to ensure all the lifts in our six malls are fully compliant," said AsiaMalls Management managing director Tan Kee Yong.

The BCA is working to improve the lift industry in other ways. To attract workers, it is looking at setting out a defined career path for lift technicians and industry professionals, to "provide clarity... and boost confidence about their prospects in the industry".

For lift maintenance, the BCA is reviewing whether to have a structured methodology. It is also looking at using remote monitoring and diagnostics to raise productivity.