



**COVID-19:  
Recommissioning  
of lifts and escalators**

## COVID-19: Recommissioning of lifts and escalators

Many lifts and escalators will have been switched off during lockdown. Whilst many will return to regular service without any glitches, there are some precautionary steps that should be taken before this is done. The passage of time during the unexpected extended period of lockdown may have caused situations in which premature component wear or failure can be expected.

If a lift has been isolated at the main isolator, the lift contractor should be called in to return it to service. If there is any doubt about a lift or lifts, the maintenance contractor should be contacted to bring the lift back into safe use.

If a lift has been maintained throughout the lockdown period, the chances of problems are reduced; nevertheless, problems may arise.

With respect to lifts, social distancing will be a problem. A simple calculation will reveal that lifts with a rated load of 20 persons or fewer can carry only one person while the two-metre social distancing rule is observed. Consider staggered working hours and/or working to reduce peak demand on lifts. This document should be read in conjunction with *COVID-19: Lift use and occupancy*, available at [www.cibse.org/emerging-from-lockdown](http://www.cibse.org/emerging-from-lockdown).

Clean off surfaces, including push buttons, doors, and lift car walls frequently; but be aware that some cleaning agents may cause damage to buttons and/or cause them to stick.

For further information see the Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations 1998 (HMSO, 1998), the statutory regulation that applies to workplaces, often abbreviated to LOLER. This regulation requires a thorough examination of passenger lifts every six months – rather like an MOT for a motor vehicle. Make sure that your LOLER certificate is up to date, and do not put the lift back into service without a current certificate.

If the lift has been out of service and decommissioned properly, ask your lift contractor to come and reinstate it. Do NOT do it yourself.

If the LOLER certificate is out of date, the lift must not be used – there are no extensions to the deadlines under LOLER due to coronavirus.

If the lift is hydraulic, it may have sunk onto the buffers due to internal valve leakage over the time it has been switched off.

The safest way, by far, is to organise a routine maintenance visit to get the lift back into service; the lubrication on the guides may have dried out, or simply run to the base of the guides themselves. As a result, the lift may make an awful noise when returned to service.

The extended lockdown period may have caused suspended solids in the hydraulic oil to sink to the bottom of the tank. When a lift is restarted these may be churned up by the action of the motor and pump, causing internal damage to the valve block or other hydraulic components (such as seals).

Consideration should be given to flushing through the hydraulic system, removing sediment, and replacing the oil. In some cases, the hydraulic oil may have demulsified.



It is also possible that due to hydraulic oil leakage, the lift will not be able to reach the top floor.



In addition, the pit may have some water content that has backed up from some source.



Traction lifts must also be thoroughly checked. Many brakes may not have operated during lockdown, and may be sluggish as a result. In some cases the brake drum, suspension ropes and other components may have surface rust due to lack of use, thus requiring attention.



Escalators are not covered by LOLER (HMSO, 1998), but after a period out of service, the drive and steps chains may require lubrication.

It is also worth making sure that no foreign bodies that may cause a comb plate trip are present on the step band when restarted. There are some very good guidelines in the Safety Assessment Federation document *Guidelines for the safe operation of escalators and moving walks* (SAFed, 2018) that provide recommended daily checks for escalator owners but, once again, a routine maintenance visit prior to going into service would be a good idea.

As with all periods of inactivity, it is possible that a build up of detritus may be present. This is often a build up of dust, dirt and lubricant, and may well be flammable. Any detritus should be cleaned off before restarting.

In conclusion, it is strongly recommended that any lift or escalator be subjected to a thorough maintenance visit prior to re-entering service.

## References

- HMSO. (1998). *The Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations*. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office. Retrieved July 14, 2021, from <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/1998/2307/contents/made>
- SAFed. (2018). *Guidelines for the safe operation of escalators and moving walks*. London: Safety Assessment Federation. Retrieved July 14, 2021, from [https://www.safed.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/MRC\\_EMW\\_\\_\\_Issue\\_03\\_30-July-2018.pdf](https://www.safed.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/MRC_EMW___Issue_03_30-July-2018.pdf)

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