

# LIFTING MALLS

## Part - VI

**T**he following news extract compels me to once again draw attention to E&E safe practices - the Times of India of May 12th, 2008 reported "..... An eight-year old boy died after he lost his footing and fell two floors from an escalator at a Varanasi mall on Sunday".

This unfortunate incident appears to be identical to the incident that happened in Bangalore last year. It probably reflects another instance of aesthetics and design taking priority over practical requirements. It also reflects another case of an E&E company not being able to recognize the obvious hazards surrounding their installation and insisting on precautionary measures.

Notwithstanding the size of the gaps, absence of barriers etc, if the guardian accompanying

the child had been aware that an elder is supposed to hold the hand of a child using the escalator; perhaps we would have avoided another addition to the statistics.

Another wake-up call was issued by ELENET® 436 (February 27, 2008) that reported that ".....STATS ON CHILDREN IN ELEVATOR SAFETY REPORT: A recent study showed that almost 30,000 children were injured in elevator accidents in the U.S. between 1990 and 2004. The study, which used U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission data, is the first large-scale epidemiological study evaluating elevator injuries to children in the U.S. It showed that 29,030 children suffered injuries requiring hospital treatment, with 98% of these being treated and released from emergency departments. The most frequent cause of injury was the elevator door closing on a body part, usually affecting the upper body region and causing soft tissue damage. Children up to two years of age accounted for the greatest number (28.6%) of injuries. The study also found that when elevators are used appropriately, the number of elevator-related injuries declines dramatically. It revealed that only 5.4% of such injuries in children requiring an emergency-room visit were the result of elevator malfunction...."

While the number of incidents itself is shocking, the last two sentences of the extract highlights the point that I have been stressing on, the need to train users. Safety can't be achieved by posting notices or instructions which in some locations extend to over a hundred words and would indicate that the intention is not to prevent an incident but more at safeguarding the owner / supplier / maintenance company



from litigation. More notices and stationing more untrained security guards are not the solution. On the other hand, the solution is constant communication and intense and repeated intervention through all possible audio visual means (the Safe-T rider program can be made available from EESF) at all possible forums like schools, malls, metros, airports etc.

The E&E industry, developers and all other associate organizations have to actively lead and participate to spread the required awareness to stop this ticking clock. With the proliferation of mall development into Tier II & Tier III cities and the numerous new E&E companies spurting up the clock is ticking ever faster. We owe it to our Customers, and more than that to our near ones, who might,

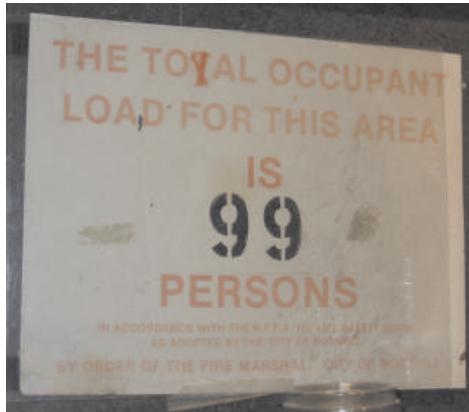
plonk my food tray.

Probably the years of having worked for multi-national companies where day-in and day-out you are expected to practice safe working and conduct hazard analysis, triggered a scary thought in my mind - would it possible to safely evacuate this crowd in a timely and



God forbid, be the next addition to the accident statistics involving the world's safest mode of transportation.

Coming back to malls, circulation and ease of access obviously are not of any consequence if the product is exceptionally good. It will make you climb any mountain, cross the deepest sea or the largest desert. Having navigated to the summit after scaling what appeared to be endless flights of escalators and crossing mostly empty floors of the Mall, I was amazed to see an ocean of people at the top. As I walked towards the crowd to investigate the activity, the delicate aromas told me that I had arrived at the Food Court. It was well past lunch time, yet the Food Court was packed, hardly standing space let alone sitting space. Each of the food outlets had long queues of customers waiting to order. I wondered at the crowd during peak meal times and holidays or at the simultaneous release of a few block buster movies. It took me 20 minutes to get to the cash counter and even more time to find a place to



orderly manner? I couldn't readily identify the emergency exits or stairs, nor were there any indications as to what the visitors were expected to do in an emergency.

A number of the lifts were not working, not that the number was adequate to handle this population. Casual queries indicated that at most times the lifts were shut down. In any case lifts are not expected to be used during a fire unless aided by fire marshals.

Assuming that the emergency was not near the escalators, the escalators appeared to be the only possible evacuation route. Yet it would surely lead to a stampede and considering that the escalators were located over an open atrium, you did not require great imagination to visualize the disastrous consequences.

It was obvious that the place was over – crowded way beyond its holding capacity, not that there appeared to be any indication of what should be the holding maximum capacity.

The questions that come up are what is the maximum capacity? Who decides this? My colleague and I visited a number of

malls and other public areas to check the practices across other properties. With mall development being a new trend, it became obvious that the area was grey with no norm. It is not as if this not a concern. The concern is very real amongst most developers yet without guidelines and rules the matter is left to individual initiatives.

Some of the isolated suggestions that have come up in recent times like locating multiplexes on the ground floor, providing a fire station in each mall etc. would point to not knowing what to do and the absence of experienced and pragmatic experts who could establish a holistic set of standards and rules.

On the other hand, most countries from around the world that I have visited appear to have clear rules on the maximum allowable persons that are allowed in public areas. There is no ambiguity. Approvals and licenses are issued based on the maximum limit. It is mandatory that the permitted maximum occupant load is prominently displayed. The onus of ensuring that the occupancy load is not exceeded lies with the Owners. The solution appears fairly simple. 😊



#### About the author:

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