

Speech to the European Lift Association re: Safety rules for the construction and installation of lifts – Existing Lifts – Part 80: Rules for the improvement of safety / BAS TREFFERS / 4 June 2004

Ladies and gentlemen,

Together with the EDF comments on the Safety Norm for Existing Lifts 81-80, I want to investigate modestly whether there is a consistent implementation of laws and standards or whether we are faced with policies reacting to incidents.

Let me begin with two recent examples from my home-country, the Netherlands:

Two weeks ago, a train, driving less than 40 km per hour, collided with a stationary train near the Central Station of Amsterdam. There were 7 severely injured passengers. The reason for the accident is the outdated safety system which doesn't work when trains are travelling at low speed. Based on the costs, which were estimated to reach several hundred million euros, both the government and the Dutch Railways hesitated to renew the new safety system which has already been introduced in many other European countries. The president of the body responsible for investigating the origin of train accidents threatened not to do so in the future "even if there were 90 victims". He warned that "Safety has not been the highest priority for this government." In the meantime the Dutch Parliament has intervened, but this is a clear example of political indifference towards safety when serious financial implications are involved.

My second example is a recently publicized Report from the Social Cultural Planbureau, a Dutch Governmental Institute, called Aged People 2004. The report states that (one in three) 20.000 people are older than 55 years are not able to leave their homes independently because of the lack of a lift. The Report concludes that if no lifts are installed in this kind of housing stock, many of these older people will have to relocate to care centres. On the other hand, the SCP also makes the point that many of the care centres' population could live independently if more accessible housing stock were available.

These examples show the gap between old and new technologies causing problems with safety and the observation that lifts are of utmost importance for people with a variety of disabilities. Half of the total population of disabled people have mobility impairments, in the Netherlands that is about 700.000 people. This percentage is valid for the whole Union.

I am here to highlight the importance of such standards as SNEL to millions of Europeans. I am here to bring a disability perspective to your discussion, but I am also here to remind you that accessibility and design-for-all benefit more than just disabled people.

Accessibility is about removing barriers – it is about removing physical barriers in the urban and built environment. But accessibility is also about safety. Inaccessible environments are unsafe for disabled people and unsafe for other members of

society. All too often, safety is disregarded in order to save money and all too often people argue against accessibility because they say it is too costly.

There are more than 3 million lifts in use today in the EU and EFTA countries and almost 50% of lifts were installed more than 20 years ago. There are more than 45 million disabled people in Europe, many of whom rely on lifts to be able to fully participate in society by accessing the whole of the built environment. But with an ageing population, and taking into consideration other people who may have reduced mobility – like parents with children in prams, people with temporary disabilities and older people – the proportion of the population who can benefit from accessibility is at least 20%!

Today, I will address the importance of the SNEL norm, and I will make several points about the recommendations presented in the CEN document. Before I continue, let me say a few words about EDF. The European Disability Forum (EDF) is the European umbrella organisation of the disability movement. EDF is composed of national councils of disabled people's organisations from each of the EU Member States as well as members from Norway and Iceland. EDF also has European Non-Governmental member organisations representing a diversity of kinds of disabilities. Today, since the first of May, EDF represents more than 45 million disabled people in all EU and EFTA Member States.

The European Disability Forum has been active in lobbying for improved accessibility in all areas of society: for example, education, employment, transport, goods and services, and the built environment. Central to our approach is a focus on principles of Design for All. EDF has, since early 2003, been campaigning for an EU Disability Specific Directive which would include legal provisions on access to the built environment. Without equal access to the built environment, disabled people can never achieve free movement and equality with non-disabled persons.

EDF's predecessor, the HELIOS-Forum, fought hard to have the 'design for all' aspects in the Lift Directive of 1995. Based on this successful lobby, the standardisation work could start in CEN TC 10 WG 7, which I had the honour to convene. This was finally publicized as EN 81-70:2003, *Safety rules for the construction and installations of lifts - Particular applications for passenger and good passenger lifts - Part 70: Accessibility to lifts for persons including persons with disability*. In the beginning, the mindset of the experienced standardizers from the Lift industry and Notifying Bodies had to be changed quite radically. But over the years we have seen great change in awareness; from special lifts for disabled people towards lifts for all.

The European-Commission-sponsored EU Expert Report '2010: A Europe Accessible for All' provides a lobbying platform for EDF to campaign for implementation of the report's recommendations starting with existing EU initiatives which could be developed upon to create clearer rules on access to the built environment across Europe.

I was a member of the Expert group that drafted the report, as was the Secretary General of this European Lift Association. Let me mention some of the

recommendations in the Report:

- require on a mandatory basis audits of existing constructions every 5 years;
- require lifts in residential construction - For older people most accidents took place in the home. An accessible home is a safer home;
- include mandatory accessibility requirements in relation with projects funded by the EU structural and cohesion funds;
- develop the role of standardization organizations as a repository of information on accessibility and to develop a European standard on accessibility for all in design, construction and use of buildings;
- include accessibility provisions in public procurement tenders

Some people worry that Accessibility is costly. But as we showed in our Report, accessibility should be seen as an **investment in infrastructure, leading to increased production and higher productivity.**

How is this possible? Let me give you a few examples:

Accessibility creates value for owners: A building that meets accessibility requirements will be able to adapt easily to changing needs (including the ageing or emerging disabilities of its occupants). The value of accessible buildings is higher than less-accessible properties that would require extensive adaptations in the future.

Accessibility attracts and retains workers: With accessible buildings – and often, only with limited adjustments – employers can tap into a pool of **potential new workers**, people with disabilities, and **retain** those who may become disabled.

Accessibility lowers social protection expenditures: An accessible environment enables people with disabilities and older people to participate in the labour force and to enjoy an autonomous social life. This may save public money spent on social benefits and institutionalized care.

Putting the economic arguments aside... **accessibility is a rights issue.** Accessibility is essential to non-discrimination and equal opportunities.

Let me now focus on the lift norms we are discussing today: As I stated before, almost 50 % of Europe's 3 million lifts were installed over 2 decades ago. Existing lifts have been installed only to meet the safety levels appropriate at that time. This level is less than today's state of the art for safety.

There are discrepancies between older lifts and the ones installed according to EN 81-70. People with disabilities are running risks in using these lifts. Accidents today happen in existing lifts, sometimes very old lifts. Even if maintenance is well done (which is mostly the case, since all European countries follow-up with accreditation

of the maintenance companies), old lifts are only required to respect the safety legislation applicable at the time of their installation! A lift installed in 1949 does not have the same safety features and systems in place as a newly installed lift. Old lifts must be inspected with the new SNEL norm in hand, and wherever necessary, upgrades to non-compliant parts of the lift should be undertaken immediately.

Let me refer to several examples from the EN 81-10 document which the disability movement sees as particularly important.

First is the levelling and stopping accuracy plus/minus 10 mm. An example: A person in a wheelchair has taken the lift on the ground floor, went in forwards, arrives at, let's say the fourth floor. There is no mirror in the lift, looking backwards is impossible or difficult. The person drives backwards and.....is not able to leave because the level is too high or..... he will fall down out of the lift (risking tumbling out of the wheelchair and seriously injuring himself) because the stopping level is higher than the landing floor. Alternatively, if the difference of landing level is lower than the lift floor level, a wheelchair user risks not being able to enter the lift at all. The new norm addresses both of these problems by requiring a stopping accuracy that is safe.

A too big distance between car door and landing door is risky for people with walking sticks, crutches and so on. The new norm ensures that this does not happen.

And it is important to remember the diversity of disabilities. Lifts are not only relied on by wheelchair users like me. Disabled people include people with visual, hearing, intellectual and physical disabilities.

When information devices for visually impaired and hard of hearing and deaf people, are missing, serious problems are caused. Information features such as the panel of buttons, such as the floor level display above the door, such as visual and audio (?) alarms help inform and orientate lift-users. Both visual and audio information is crucial. However, EN 81-70 designed lifts are required to have the button panel located in exactly the same place in every lift – this is hugely helpful to blind and partially sighted individuals who can rely on knowing exactly where to find the button panel.

Finally, accessibility for all is a fundamental right and implementation of the SNEL norm brings us one step closer to a barrier-free society for all. SNEL is a Dutch word for quick, rapid or fast. Let it be implemented quickly!

Thank you,

Bas Treffers
European Disability Forum