Submission to: Wards Dealer Business – Ed Gibbons, Automotive Compliance Consultants

**OSHA Lift Inspections Coming Your Way**

By Ed Gibbons

Since June, the Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) has begun a systematic march across the USA inspecting vehicle lifts. Lifts used at automobile dealerships are included.

Given some of the knuckleheaded things I’ve witnessed technicians do to keep an improperly working lift “useful,” this news might save a life.

We advise dealers to have their service and body shops’ lifts inspected annually and properly maintained. Be sure to compile all lift maintenance records in proper order. These preliminary steps will help ensure compliance to OSHA’s Local Emphasis Program (LEP) for inspecting automotive lifts. These records will include the inspection sheet, inspection log, and the certificate stating the lift is ready for use or that it is locked out until the problem is fixed.

OSHA’s lift inspections started in Hawaii and then progressed through Guam, the Northern Marianas Islands and American Samoa. In August, OSHA lift inspectors started hitting dealerships in Oklahoma and Wisconsin.

An early summer OSHA press release said, “OSHA compliance officers will begin conducting random inspections to identify and evaluate hazards of lifts used in the automotive industry, including at automobile dealerships.” A memo from the Wisconsin Automobile & Truck Association announced OSHA inspections to its members. “What this means to Wisconsin automobile and truck dealers is, OSHA will be paying you a visit,” the memo notes. “Under a LEP, OSHA typically systematically sweeps the entire dealer body throughout the state.”

We would have to assume that this is just the beginning of a nationwide OSHA lift inspection march.

**Neglect is costly**

Lifts are so well designed today that operators can take their continued safe operation for granted and perhaps neglect their proper maintenance. Unfortunately, when lifts do malfunction for whatever reason, production-focused technicians will often implement makeshift “fixes” so their work can continue.

Consider this “fix” example, which unfortunately is not rare. At one dealership, for instance, a technician bypassed the release valve by placing a wrench in the handle to lock it in a down position. He did this so the lift would lower while he went to the parts department to pick up his parts. The technician then left his stall and while walking away one side of the lift locked. Since there was no one there to stop the vehicle’s descent, it flipped the car onto one side, causing it to fall from the lift onto another car in an adjacent stall, almost crushing the technician working there. This “fix” totaled both automobiles. Thankfully, no one was hurt.
Lift injuries and fatalities have been a concern of OSHA for years. The fines can be very substantial. In 2009, a California tech lost a middle finger while lowering a lift. OSHA’s fine was $19,400. In 2011, a Colorado service center, after repeat violations, including unsafe and unstable lifts, earned the dealership a $76,000 fine. In Boston, lift failure causing a vehicle to fall off resulted in a $19,000 OSHA fine.

Since 2007, OSHA has conducted inspections after 11 fatalities related to lifts, and the Consumer Product Safety Commission reported 15,000 workers have been treated in hospitals for automotive lift, jack, or jack stand injuries.

No dealership wants its employees put in harm’s way by improperly working automotive lifts. Nor can they afford these accidents’ effect on their garagekeeper’s or workers compensation policy rates or their community relations. None wants to pay OSHA fines!

Prepare for OSHA
While we don’t know where or when OSHA will march into other states, perhaps yours, we can help dealers answer one important question, “How can we be prepared?”

A place to start is to review the maintenance documents for the lifts installed in your service bays. A next sound step is to conduct an inspection. A qualified individual with extensive knowledge of all the various lifts that exist should conduct these inspections. As most such situations require what we call an audit trail, an unbiased third party typically better performs inspections so no corners are cut. Such preventive activity will help identify any actual and potential areas of concern. Thus, they can be corrected and lifts can be in good working order, properly protecting operators should OSHA suddenly knock.

Finally, and this is especially important, expose any lift operators to a refresher lift maintenance and safety training. Any technicians or other individuals who operate lifts must receive training on the type of lift they will be using. You must keep records of all training, along with lift safety certifications, logs and inspection sheets. This is essential!

Preparatory lift inspection checklist
Lift inspections should check for:

- **15-minute leak test (vehicle elevated)**
- **Hydraulic system**
  - Capacity _________ LBS
  - Test function:
  - Oil level & inspect for leaks
  - Valves
  - Hoses
- **Cables, chains, V-belts, spindles**
  - Check for excessive play
  - Amount of wear
  - Cables lubricated
  - Pulleys greased
- **Pulleys, pins, sprockets**
  - Condition
- **Rolling bridge, wheel free**
  - Capacity _________ LBS
  - Leak test
  - Lock test
  - Rollers or slides

- **Columns, posts**
  - Rust/damage/wear
  - Alignment
  - Rubbing blocks or guide rollers

- **Electrical**
  - Function of switches
  - Limit switch
  - Condition of terminals

- **General**
  - Decking & covers secured
  - Anchor bolts & other fasteners
  - Swing arm restraints, telescoping stops
  - Wheel chocks
  - Runway stops
  - Drive up ramps
  - Test lift locks
  - Inspect/test other safety features
  - Lift Pad Condition
  - Other

Each lift must have a separate inspection sticker. If the lift passes inspection, it will receive a certification and listed on the log report. This log documents which lifts have passed inspection and which have failed. Invoices for correcting repairs must be filed with this log. Only then will those lifts receive certification. Note that with OSHA’s inspection, either lifts get a pass or the owner gets a fine.

Finally, and this is important to repeat, trained third-party inspectors who are familiar with all types of lifts and brands should do lift inspections. Repairs also should be done by lift maintenance individuals trained on the type and brand of the lift in need of repair. Lack of knowledge by the inspector or the person doing the lift repair could be dangerous. Only original equipment parts should be used when doing repairs.

OSHA’s lift inspectors are spreading out across America, likely soon to visit your dealership. Prudence should result in all lifts used in service, quick lane and body shop be pre-inspected and then maintained properly, not only to be ready for an OSHA inspection but to ensure worker safety.

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