



# Kansas RTAP Fact Sheet

A Service of The University of Kansas Transportation Center for Rural Transit Providers

## New Lift Standards in Effect

by Matthew Kaufman

In December 2002 the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) issued new safety standards for lifts on motor vehicles. While the new standards will not immediately affect your operations, they may result in slightly higher lift prices down the road.

NHTSA created two new standards for lift safety so that personal-use lifts can be manufactured to less stringent standards than public-use lifts. The latter must meet the needs of many users with various mobility impairments. The cutoff point between the two standards occurs when gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) reaches 10,000 pounds. Lifts on vehicles with ratings above this amount (and all vehicles commercially operated for paratransit, regardless of GVWR) must comply with the stricter standard. This article will discuss requirements of the stricter standard.

### **Main goal is to reduce injuries**

When debating the new standards NHTSA looked at information from the Consumer Product Safety Commission, which estimates that 299,734 wheelchair users, or 26 percent of the wheelchair-using public, suffered wheelchair related injuries between 1991 and 1995. A much smaller (but still significant) number of injuries—1,366—were caused by wheelchair lifts.

It is expected that more people will start using lifts on public and private motor vehicles as Americans

with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements make transportation and the built environment more accessible to individuals with mobility impairments and as our population continues to age. Taking steps now to improve the safety of lifts will help reduce accidents in the future.

The new standards will limit the maximum speed of lift platforms during use, stowage, and deployment. This change will likely safeguard cane and walker users riding on the

more deployments.

Changes to the lift standards will also affect the number of gaps, transitions, and openings on lift platforms, the maximum angle of the platform while loaded and during unloading. The new rules will require the addition of retention devices to prevent wheelchairs from falling off lifts or wheelchair users from falling from their chairs. These changes should also prevent users from tripping or slipping on lift platforms.

### **Operating volume limits are designed to ensure that lift operators can always hear lift users.**

platform as well as persons standing close to the platform.

Limits controlling the maximum noise level of lifts are expected to improve customer service. Many lift users have reported being ignored by lift operators who could not hear them. The volume limits are designed to ensure that lift operators can always hear users.

### **Lifts will last longer**

Significantly stricter fatigue endurance tests and stricter rules regarding the environmental resistance of lifts may result in your lifts lasting longer and having fewer breakdowns. New environmental resistance standards require that more parts be rust resistant, while new fatigue endurance standards require lifts to handle

### **Operator errors will be reduced**

Electronic devices called interlocks are being added to prevent injuries. Interlocks will prevent lifts from moving if all retention devices are not in place or if the lift encounters resistance. Deployment of outer barriers or inner roll stops will be prevented when the lift is occupied. Interlocks will also prevent deployment if the lift's access door is closed. This final feature will prevent drivers from damaging vehicles and lifts by accidentally deploying lifts when access doors are closed. All of the changes will help prevent lift operators for making errors that could jeopardize the safety of lift users.

A new owner's manual insert will be included with lifts. The insert will specify the recommended maintenance

schedule and lift usage instructions.

### **Financing the changes**

The new rules will take effect December 27, 2004, and apply only to newly-manufactured lifts. Lift manufacturers and, in a few cases, vehicle manufacturers will be responsible for complying with the new guidelines.

As might be expected, the cost of the lifts designed to meet these new standards will likely go up. NHTSA estimates the standards will add no more than \$300 to the cost of a new lift. However, Transport & Trolley, a current manufacturer of lifts, estimates that the new standards will add \$1,000 to the cost of a new lift.

To read more about these standards, visit the NHTSA website at [www.nhtsa.dot.gov](http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov). Information is available under their "Vehicle and Equipment Information" link.

### **Sources**

*Federal Register*, Vol. 67, No. 249, pages 79416-79451;

"DOT Agency Publishes Rule for New List Safety Standard" from *Transit Access Report*, January 10, 2003.

Reprinted from the July 2003 issue of the *Kansas TransReporter*, a publication of the Kansas Rural Transit Assistance Program (RTAP) at the Kansas University Transportation Center.