

Disabling the Safety Locks, Lift Maintenance and Operator Awareness

Automotive lifts are one of the most expensive and the most dangerous pieces of equipment in automobile dealerships today. Lifts are absolutely necessary to operate your business and it is important to promote safe work practices for all service personnel. At PMA, we've placed additional focus on lift safety during our routine safety surveys in hopes of enhancing previous safety training efforts and improving lift safety awareness among technicians. This edition has been written to increase your awareness of the most common safety problems associated with lifts. The article describes some of the typical "short-cuts" that occur in service and maintenance departments. Left unnoticed, serious injury and even death can occur.

A Typical Lift

The picture below shows a Rotary brand offset lift with all the safety locks and warnings in proper position.



Lifts with Unsafe Conditions

The picture below shows an older model of the same style lift. Notice that the covers have been removed from the safety lock system, and the safety locks have been disabled with string and wire.



Safety locks can be disabled using any number of objects, for example: fountain pen, air hose, bolt, screw driver, bungee cords, wire/string, soda pop cans, etc. Managers should be “on the lookout” for these disabling devices and prohibit their use by technicians to reduce the risk of lift failure.



This picture is an example of where the lift safety device has been disabled with what looks like a spark plug.

Now, the full weight of the vehicle will rest on the hydraulic system, and if a failure occurs, the vehicle will fall to the ground, not to mention **crush a technician that may be working underneath the vehicle OR a technician in the next bay.**



This picture shows how a technician has disabled the hydraulic control lever with a bungee cord to keep the hydraulic controls in an open operating position.

This "short-cut" bypasses the mechanical safety locks that are designed within the lift and weakens the effectiveness of the lift's hydraulics, which causes lift failure.



Here is a rotary cassette lift with both the hydraulic controls and safety lock disabled

Just as in earlier pictures, this lift has no safety locks engaged to stop the lift from falling to the ground in the event of hydraulic failure.

**Okay... We can easily see the dangers involved in disabling these lifts.
But why would a technician do this?**

The quick answer is... It is a "short-cut".

The long answer is... Lifts are designed with two-hand safety controls that must be engaged for the lift to operate. The purpose for the safety controls is to keep the technician a safe distance away from a descending lift. Unfortunately, some technicians will lock down these levers so they can walk away from the lift to do other things, which puts them in danger.

The result... The lift's mechanical devices are placed under excessive strain which can cause lift failure. If the lift drops, the vehicle becomes unbalanced and can fall off the lift, endangering technicians standing nearby.

Lifts with Unsafe Conditions

Your technicians are skilled employees, who generally understand how to operate a lift. But, there are still some important reasons to provide lift safety training:

- Automotive lift controls, usage instructions, and safety devices vary by manufacturer and lift type. As a result, you may hire a new employee who is familiar with lifts, but not necessarily your particular brand of lift. It is important that new employees be properly trained to use the lifts at your dealership safely.
- New hires may have picked up “bad habits” from prior employers which you don’t want to see in your shop. For that reason, it’s important to be sure that new hires are aware of your dealership’s expectations and safety procedures.
- OSHA requires that warning labels and instruction manuals be attached to lifts for reference by technicians. OSHA also requires that all employees using specific equipment be properly trained to use the equipment safely and effectively. If you don’t provide documented refresher training, the dealership will be charged with violations and fines.
- More than ever before, managers and executives are being held personally liable for failure to provide appropriate safety training and/or enforce appropriate safety rules. It is important that management establish documented safety training and compliance demands to ensure due diligence for employee safety.

The Automotive Lift Institute (ALI) works with vehicle manufacturers to develop lift performance and safety standards. Many of these standards are adopted by the lift manufacturers and incorporated into their lift designs. ALI also provides lift safety training resources, vehicle lift point guides, and operating manuals that are endorsed by lift manufacturers and can be used to provide the necessary safety training to your technicians. ALI safety training resources can be obtained by accessing their website at: www.autolift.org.

Lift Inspection & Maintenance

Lift inspection and maintenance also play an important role in automotive lift safety. A daily lift inspection should be completed by the foreman or service manager to identify issues that may arise as a result of daily operations (i.e. lift disables, cable wear, broken adapters, lack of extenders, etc.) Daily inspection and prompt repair insures that the lifts operate properly on a routine basis. Lift inspection resources are available through ALI and are referenced in your lift manufacturer’s operating manual.

Just like your customer’s vehicles need routine maintenance, so do the automotive lifts that raise your customer’s vehicles when they are serviced. Formal maintenance should be completed at least annually on all lifts to be sure that the mechanical parts of the lifts are functioning to optimal capacity. It is highly recommended that annual lift maintenance and any repairs be completed by a qualified lift contractor. Automotive lifts are the life blood of a dealership. If lifts are not serviced properly, there is increased risk for equipment damage that leads to lost productivity, liability, and employee injury. Don’t take maintenance for granted, lives and profits are at stake!

IMPORTANT NOTICE - *The information and suggestions presented by PMA Companies in this risk control document are for your consideration in your loss prevention efforts. They are not intended to be complete or definitive in identifying all hazards associated with your business, preventing workplace accidents, or complying with any safety related or other laws or regulations. You are encouraged to alter the information and suggestions to fit the specific hazards of your business and to have your legal counsel review all of your plans and company policies.*

