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ELEVATOR INSPECTION BACKLOG ON ITS WAY DOWN

(Salem) State building code officials report that inspectors have cut a backlog in annual elevator inspections statewide in half from where it stood last fall, and expect to meet their goal of eliminating it completely within the next three to four months.

“A properly permitted and installed elevator is a very safe device,” said Joseph Brewer III, administrator of the Oregon Building Codes Division. “It includes a significant safety factor built into the design. Nevertheless, the annual inspection backlog is not acceptable. The backlog represents an element of uncertainty for the public, and we’re committed to eliminating it.”

The Building Codes Division reviews plans for new elevators and similar power-driven devices, such as dumbwaiters and wheelchair lifts. The division then inspects all new elevators when they are installed, and provides annual inspections for all elevators used by the public. New elevators cannot be put into service until they have had their initial inspection. After their initial inspection, residential elevators are normally inspected only at the request of the homeowner.

There are about 8,000 permitted elevators and similar devices operating in Oregon. The division receives about 60 new elevator plans to review each month. On average more than 700 additional elevators go into service each year, representing a large workload increase for the inspection program and a highly competitive atmosphere for recruitment and retention of qualified elevator inspectors.

This led to the backlog in the annual inspection program. The division developed and implemented a plan to reduce the backlog, including the addition of new inspectors and stepped-up activity in regions of the state where the backlog was concentrated. By November of 1998 the backlog stood at 1,840 units. It now stands at 905 units. Inspectors hope to be entirely caught up by June or July of this year.

Late last year, the Building Codes Division also issued a notice alerting homeowners to potential hazards from residential elevator-type devices installed without a valid state safety inspection. Owners of homes with power-driven elevators, dumbwaiters, wheelchair lifts, and stairway chair lifts can call the division for a free inspection at 503-373-1298 or toll-free at 1-800-442-7457.

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