

Safety and health alert

09/01 Mobile equipment on pedestrian ramps

Incident

An infant suffered a serious hand injury at a suburban shopping centre in August 2000. The infant, one of two passengers in a shopping trolley, was gripping the top edge of the trolley when it struck the handrail on a pedestrian ramp. One of the infant's fingers was pinched between the trolley and handrail, and the skin was stripped from the finger. The injury required plastic surgery.

In another incident, several elderly pedestrians suffered minor injuries and shock when a person lost control of a wheelchair on a pedestrian ramp. The wheelchair, which had been hired from the shopping centre, was found to have a faulty handbrake and handgrips. The person in control of the wheelchair was not aware of the faults or the potential for mishap on the ramp.

Factors

The weight of two infants caused difficulties with controlling the shopping trolley on a ramp and increased the risk of injury should a collision occur.

The potential hazards associated with wheelchairs on ramps were not apparent to the persons riding in and pushing the wheelchair.

Neither the hazards nor other contributing risk factors associated with the use of mobile equipment on pedestrian ramps were readily identified.

While shopping trolleys and wheelchairs are essentially of uniform design, and handrails, ramps and travelators are all designed to conform to uniform building standards, members of the public who might use such equipment or facilities are often not aware of the risks of operating mobile equipment on sloping or moving surfaces.

Recommendations

Signs should be provided in public places, such as shopping centres, to warn of the potential risks associated with the use of wheeled equipment such as prams, shopping trolleys and wheelchairs on ramps and travelators.

Signs should be relevant to the findings of a risk assessment, as required by regulation 3.1 of the *Occupational Safety and Health Regulations (WA) 1996*, and should be clear and simple.

Regular maintenance and testing should be carried out on wheelchairs provided in public places, to ensure braking systems are operational and effective and that hand grips do not slide off.



Children should only be carried in the purpose built seating provided in shopping trolleys.

Further Information

Further information can be obtained from the WorkSafe internet site www.worksafe.wa.gov.au, or by contacting customer service on 1300 307 877 or email: safety@docep.wa.gov.au.

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