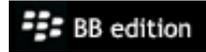




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By Dong Zhen | NEWSPAPER EDITION

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ELEVATOR accidents have claimed nine lives so far this year, compared with a total of six fatalities between 2006 and 2010, city officials said yesterday.

The Shanghai Quality and Technical Supervision Bureau attribute this dramatic increase to aging elevators and a shortage of skilled technicians.

All those killed in the five elevator accidents this year were technicians, said the bureau.

A total of 13 elevator accidents were recorded between 2006 and 2010.

"These figures indicate that the city's elevators are becoming more vulnerable to accidents," a bureau official said yesterday.

Local authorities, including police, are stepping up elevator inspections, in an effort to tackle the problem.

Lawmakers are also working on legislation to force property owners to replace aging elevator parts. No national law regulates this, allowing old parts to remain in service.

Shanghai has around 141,000 public elevators, of which 12,500 have been in service for more than 15 years, said the bureau.

Experts say most elevators should be replaced after 15 to 18 years.

Local officials say that in five years a quarter of Shanghai elevators will have been in service for more than 15 years, highlighting the need for action now.

Numbers of elevators are increasing by 12 percent a year, while there is a desperate shortage of experienced maintenance technicians.

There is no minimum sum that building owners must pay lift maintenance companies.

Consequently, companies seek to keep maintenance staffers' wages low, causing experienced workers to quit and be replaced by raw recruits, the bureau's investigation showed.

This year, six elevator maintenance companies found to be hiring unqualified technicians had their licences revoked, the watchdog said.

During citywide inspections, the bureau discovered 867 potential safety risks in current elevators. These hazards have since been addressed, officials said.

Engineers are proceeding with inspections. So far, more than 700 older lifts in three downtown districts had been examined.

These will be refitted or replaced soon, according to the bureau.

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