

Automatic Doors

The Importance of Checking your Doors Daily

By Michael Panish, Automatic Door Expert Witness & Consultant

I have been involved in many automatic door cases during the past few years working for both plaintiff and defense. As discussed in one of my previous articles (The Ins and Outs of Automatic Door Operation), automatic doors are highly complex pieces of equipment that require daily attention. Most injuries occur when some component of the automatic door system malfunctions. On most automatic door assemblies, the manufacturer places warning labels or stickers that inform the supervising manager of commercial stores that these doors require daily safety inspections. This duty of daily safety checks is the responsibility of the store or facility management. It has been stated in many depositions that the operations procedures of many stores simply do not include the daily regiment needed for properly verifying the safe operation of commercial automatic door systems.

All chain stores are in business to make the most money possible. Most store chains have developed stringent policies that include the detailed placement and stacking of their products. They mandate how wide and high a pile of boxes may be placed on the sales floor. Studies have been made to determine the orientation of product placement in relationship to the aisle traffic flow. All of these highly thought out plans are done to attract the most customers to the product featured. They set up programs on how to clean the restrooms and establish intervals for their cleaning, including restroom cleaning logs and charts for maintenance personnel. Upper management employs designers to strategically place and arrange the candy and impulse items for sale around the cash registers. In direct contrast, it has been demonstrated that many chains have no knowledge, concern or policies in place when it comes to the safe operation of their automatic pedestrian doors. They rely upon service providers and sub vendors that only make repairs when an apparent problem arises at a particular location. The stores very rarely have a periodic maintenance (P.M.) plan in place for these automatic door systems. To store management, automatic door systems are simply not part of income generation for their business.

As discovered in several past cases, the idea that there should be daily safety inspections of their automatic pedestrian doors comes as a surprise to the store manager. It is often their feeling that there is never enough time for store opening preparations, and checking on the automatic doors is not something that they have ever been asked to do. The managers are too busy readying the store for opening to spend any additional time on this non revenue generating aspect of their daily operation. The culture of the chain stores is that they pay to have door services provided when needed, so they believe individual store management bears no responsibility when an accident happens to one of their patrons.

If a lawsuit for automatic door related injury is filed against a big chain store, an attempt to transfer the blame is often directed at the repair and service entities. Automatic door manufacturers are usually included in the chain of blame. If there are multiple vendors and service providers, it is very convoluted determining who performed the service, and difficult to track the path of responsibility. Most chains clearly have no policies in place when it comes to protecting their patrons from possibly the most dangerous part of their stores.

There are several agencies and organizations that door manufacturers use as the minimum standard for safe design and practical implementation of their products. These standards are readily available to the management of any commercial store. Usually, training is given to installers, vendors and suppliers that attempt to provide standardized techniques throughout the automatic door industry. This standardized training enables service companies to inspect doors and certify that the doors at the time of the inspection met minimum safety requirements uniformly. Even though every technician and installer may have certified

training, that has no bearing on the necessity of the individual store management verifying the safe operation of the automatic doors on a daily basis. Training programs for door safety awareness are available from several organizations, door vendors and some service providers. I have never seen an example where upper management actively participates in such programs for training.

As part of my door inspection related services, I have personally offered programs to establish and develop store policies for daily safety checks and record retention for chain stores. There are a variety of proper procedures that are recommended during this program that greatly reduce the negligence of the local store management. By educating and training store management to properly evaluate their automatic pedestrian doors, they greatly reduce the risk of serious personal injury to their patrons. The focus of this training process is to insure that the store management has diligently and thoroughly evaluated the automatic door systems. This daily evaluation would bring yet another layer of safety to the store patrons and perhaps reduce the chance of injury caused by a malfunctioning automatic door system.

While evaluating your next door related injury case, it is essential that you have a full understanding of the various layers of responsibility that may play a role in the path leading to the door malfunctioning. It is critical that you find the best expert available to show you the available methods to detect and specifically identify who the responsible parties are. This is usually a multilayered issue where knowing the right expert with years of experience in the automatic door industry will greatly enhance your claim potential.

Mike Panish is a forensic expert witness and consultant in the construction industry. One of his areas of expertise pertains to automatic door cases and he has over 30 years of hands on experience dealing with commercial, multi residential, hotel, hospital, lab and other locations where specialty door systems are needed. He has written several articles on the subject of door related claims and maintenance issues related to automatic door systems. He is licensed as a door and hardware contractor in the State of California. He has been involved in automatic door cases across the United States. He has been used as a consultant and has been retained and designated as expert in many types of door injury related claims for both the plaintiff and defense. Mike is able to quickly ascertain the facts, explain the critical information pertaining to your case and can assist you in developing your case from discovery through trial. He has offices in California, New Hampshire and Massachusetts. He is available for nationwide consulting and expert analysis and testimony. Michael Panish can be reached at (818) 429-1963 (Sharon) or visit www.AutomaticDoorExpertWitness.com