

Loading & Unloading Vans

By: Nate Ward, Loss Control Consultant, Thomas McGee- A Division of Risk-Strategies

Intro:

A conversation that many of us are used to within the long-term care industry is the challenges involved with resident transfer and repositioning. Our conversations typically revolve around subjects like team lifts, assistive lifting devices, and lifting residents off the floor. An aspect of resident transfers and repositioning that we do not often focus on is the safe loading and unloading of residents in facility vehicles.

Loading and unloading residents from vehicles creates a unique soft tissue hazard. When we think about what causes soft tissue injuries, some common characteristics are prolonged strain and incorrect posture. Much like lifting and transferring in a small bathroom, in a vehicle, there is limited room for movement when lifting and transferring. This puts the body in awkward positions which makes it more susceptible to soft tissue injuries.

While we cannot physically alter the vehicles to make them bigger, we can adjust the way that we approach the hazard. Loading and unloading residents from vehicles calls for attention to safety to prevent accidents and injuries to ourselves and our residents. In the following section, we will review various steps to consider while participating in loading/unloading activities.

Safety Tips:

1. Pre-use Inspections & Maintenance

Before ever using any lifting equipment, there should always be a thorough pre-use inspection. The goal of these pre-use inspections is to ensure that our equipment is functioning properly and is safe to use. Warning signs, weight capacities, seatbelts/securement devices, moving mechanical parts, and exposed cords should all be aspects of what we look over during our pre-use inspections. Any defects found in the lift or ramp should be reported immediately. If any defect is found, the lift should not be used until it is fixed. If any defect is found, the lift should be tagged out and marked as such until repairs can be made. Using a broken lift or failing to follow warning signs can result in injuries to the employee, resident, or both. A way to stay in front of equipment breaking down is to have regular maintenance of vehicle lifts and ramps.

Editor's Note:

The KING Safety Matters newsletter is published monthly to provide general safety information. It is not a substitute for adequate safety training, or intended to provide complete safety information or training, on any specific subject. The information contained herein is intended to assist safety efforts and increase safety awareness.

In order to ensure the contents of the newsletter are helpful and important to you, please feel free to send comments, suggestions, and feedback to:

Nate Ward, ARM, GSP
Loss Control Consultant
Thomas McGee L.C.
nward@risk-strategies.com

Kevin McFarland
President/CEO
KING
kevin@leadingagelkanssas.org



2. Proper Use of Ramps & Lifts

Vehicle ramps and lifting devices should be used as instructed by the manufacturer. Never exceed the weight limit of the lift. The weight capacity should be readily available and marked on the equipment. Equipment should never be used until it is fully extended and secured. When loading a resident on a lift, ensure that the resident is seat belted and secure before beginning to raise the lift. When walking up or down a ramp, offer physical assistance to residents. While operating the lift, operate slowly and steadily until the lift is secured.

3. Vehicle Stability & Parking

Plan. Before using vehicle lifts and ramps, make sure the vehicle is parked on a flat-level surface and the parking brake is engaged. This will make the vehicle as sturdy as it can be. Inspect the area around the vehicle to see that it is free from uneven surfaces and debris that could lead to slips, trips, and fall injuries. At the facility, have a designated loading zone that is a flat-level surface where nothing is being stored in or around.

4. Training & Preparedness

All staff involved with the loading and unloading of residents should be trained on proper techniques, including how to use assistive devices, handle emergencies, pre-use inspections, and proper reporting processes. Additionally, staff should be trained on safe vehicle operations. Staff involved with loading and unloading and residents from vehicles should receive training upon hire. Competencies should be reviewed annually. Training should also occur when new equipment is added, or a process has changed.

5. Reporting

Finally, there should be a formal reporting process for all incidents and near-misses. All incidents that are reported should be reviewed to develop prevention. Reports should be kept on file so trends can be identified.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, ensuring the safety of senior residents during the loading and unloading process from vehicles is paramount and requires a comprehensive approach that includes proper equipment use, staff training, and pre-planning. By following these safety recommendations, the risk of accidents and injuries can be significantly minimized. Following the steps above not only protects residents but also protects the staff involved.

