

MODERNIZING YOUR ELEVATORS

by James B Hutchinson

Today more than ever, building owners are faced with rising elevator maintenance costs. Worse, the next elevator labor union contract will only bring more of the same.

As a result of these anticipated steep increases, savvy homeowner associations have begun to realize that elevator modernization is made necessary not only by the age of the equipment, but also by the realization that there are real economic advantages to bringing the equipment up-to-date. By replacing old maintenance-intensive equipment with new state-of-the-art equipment that requires little or no route adjustments, elevator maintenance costs can be reduced by as much as 50 percent.

If your association's Board of Directors is like those for most buildings, they've begun looking at elevator modernization already, not necessarily because they want to, but because they must. Rising maintenance costs, poor elevator performance and increases in elevator breakdowns have all contributed to the need for action. Additionally, members are beginning to express concerns over why the association is continuing to pay high-priced maintenance charges for old elevators, when it could be paying lower-priced maintenance charges for new ones. If modernization is the solution, where does the Board begin?

Finding a good elevator company to modernize your building's elevators is not unlike trying to find a good repair shop to work on your car. Just as one would do when looking for a good auto mechanic, the Board should start by talking to associations that have already undertaken an elevator modernization program,

seeking information on companies that have a good reputation both for doing quality work and for satisfying their customers. They should then meet with representatives of the companies with the highest recommendations to discuss the proposed project.

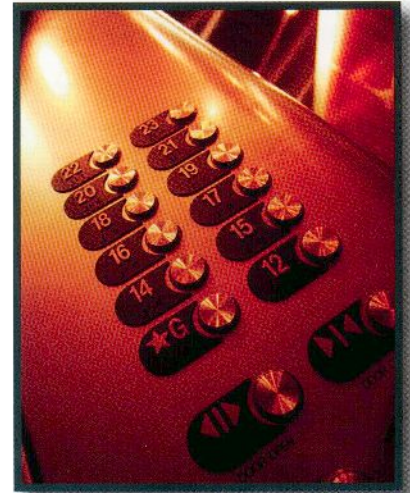
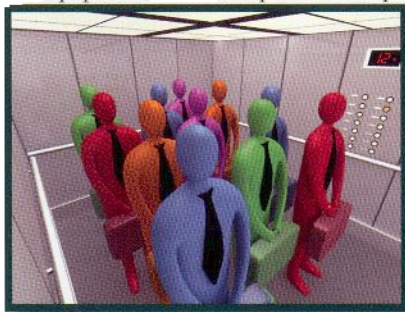
Some Board members are likely to express the belief that an elevator modernization is too complex an enterprise to be undertaken without the assistance of a paid consultant. Such an option does not come without its own difficulties though. One of the biggest problems with using a consultant is that he or she will typically "over-spec" the project, prescribing more work than is actually necessary to accomplish a successful modernization.

This is their way of protecting themselves from liability. Unfortunately, it's the building owners who pay the price for this. Many consultants fail to understand that most homeowner associations are not looking to replace their old Ford with a new Ferrari, but rather to replace their old Ford with a new Ford.

A good elevator company—that is, one that's worthy of your business—should be willing to spend the necessary time with the Board, or its maintenance committee, to fully discuss both the project needs and the available options. Without this information, the Board will be unable to make an informed decision.

A good elevator company should also be able—and eager—to answer all of the Board's questions in a credible and reliable manner. And it should stand ready to advise the Board on what additional questions it should be asking. Two specific questions are obvious: What will the scope of the work be? How much will

it cost? But there are dozens more that should be asked—and answered—before the Board makes its final determination. The company that handles all of this in a fully professional and well-informed manner is the company that should be handling the modernization project.



Elevator modernization, like death and taxes, is inevitable. When it becomes clear that the need to update your system is unavoidable, delay will only cost your association more and more otherwise unnecessary expenditures, bringing down, at the same time, the value of your property.

Encourage your Board to waste no time in beginning to make plans for the eventual modernization of your building's elevators. Being prepared well before replacement becomes mandatory will save everyone involved a great deal of frustration and confusion.

James B. Hutchinson is president of Pacific Elevator Corp, a company that specializes in elevator modernization. Pacific Elevator provides free, no-obligation elevator assessments and cost analyses. To request an assessment of your building's elevators, contact Pacific Elevator at 808.395.6695.