

...ON THE JOB with Elevator Constructors #28

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vator constructors leave the site until the rest of the building frame is constructed. They return weeks or months later to place the vertical rails, construct the cabs, set up the electrical and mechanical systems, and install the doors.

Elevator constructors tend to specialize. Some focus on new construction, others on repair or modernization. Some do mostly elevators, others do escalators.

Hanley's specialty is final inspection and tune-up. He ar-

rives at projects near the end and installs the buttons and jewels (lights), the buzzers and the dingers (Audible signals are required by the Americans with Disabilities Act). He also does late-stage testing and troubleshooting to make sure newly installed elevators pass final inspection with the state.

Unlike most other construction workers, who work for a general contractor or subcontractor, most elevator constructors work for one of the big three elevator companies - Otis (headquartered in Connecticut), Kone (based in Finland

and pronounced KO-NAY) and Thyssenkrupp (a German multinational, pronounced TISS-en-krup). Each company employs its own staff installing and maintaining its proprietary technology.

Hanley has been at Otis over 10 years.

For about a year of that time, he did elevator maintenance, greasing parts and cleaning the "pits" — the floor of the elevator shaft where dust and things that fall through the cracks settle. Sometimes being an elevator maintenance worker meant he

was on call as a first responder, hurrying to buildings where elevators had malfunctioned and trapped passengers.

Such mishaps aren't common, but they do happen. Elevators are driven by an array of electrical contacts. Those can build up carbon and dust and corrode.

By code, all elevators are required to have a phone system that allows passengers to call out if the car stops working. The phone connects either to a 24-hour guard station if the building has one, or to a hotline run by a company like

Otis, which dispatches a service person.

Arriving at a building with a malfunctioning elevator, Hanley would head straight to where it's stuck and communicate with trapped passengers.

"You're okay," he'd tell them. "The elevator's not going to fall. Just hang on."

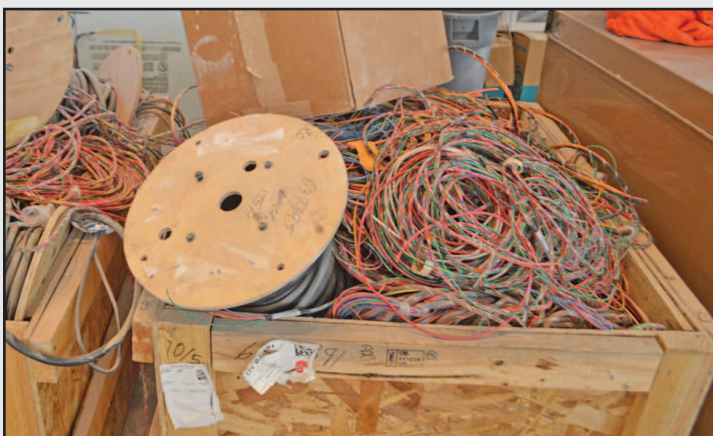
Safety is at the core of elevator construction, and has been since the dawn of the modern elevator. Contrary to popular memory, it was the Greek mathematician Archi-

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TOOLS OF THE TRADE

Elevator constructors use many of the same tools as other construction workers, but a few are unique. Above, these 40-pound static balance weights balance the cab itself to keep it centered within the guide rails and minimize the stress on the roller guides. At right is an elevator key. Because elevator keys can unlock the outer hoistway door whether or not there's a car behind it, elevator constructors keep a tight grip on them and don't give them out to other tradespeople, or even building owners. Below, a bin with some of the miles of wires that will go into the Hyatt elevators.



DON'T LOOK DOWN For the new 14-story 600-room Hyatt Regency hotel across from the Oregon Convention Center, Otis constructed 11 elevators and four escalators in the main building, and three more elevators in an adjacent parking garage. At the height of the job, 12 crews totaling 24 workers were on site for about six months. The hotel is on track to open in early 2020. Below is one of the Otis "cassettes," the machine at the top of the shaft that pulls cars up and down.

