



Risk Management

by Jesse Denton

Linen chutes save time and effort but must always be secured

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A properly installed and well-maintained linen chute is a wonderful thing. Many steps, including excessive lifting and bending, are saved by dropping linen from the floor above to the discharge area at the end of the linen chute. Some chutes discharge directly into the hotel's on-premise laundry.

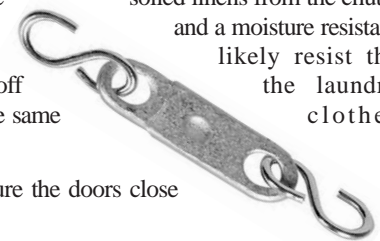
Like most wonderful things, linen chutes are frequently abused and misused. Each opening of a linen chute should have a fire rated, self-closing and self-latching door. The chute doors should either be locked when not in use or kept secured in housekeepers' closets behind locked doors. There have been several incidents where inebriated hotel guests and adventure-seeking visitors have decided to slide down a hotel's laundry chute. Since the installation of most laundry chutes is vertical, the slide instantly becomes a fall, at a minimum of around ten feet, maybe several hundred feet; unpleasant at best, deadly at worst case. People have also been known to drop foreign objects such as bowling balls, room service trays or cigarettes down open laundry chutes. This could potentially be deadly to a laundry worker. It is best to keep laundry chute doors on guestroom floors closed and locked when not attended.



The door should be fire rated because a linen chute works like a chimney if a fire occurs in the discharge area and the discharge door does not close and latch. Smoke and possibly fire will exit at each opening up the chute that is not closed and latched. During a fire in the discharge area the most important door is the one at the bottom of the chute. These doors should be held open by a chain, cable or similar apparatus which includes a fusible link between an attachment point on the chute door and an attachment point on the wall or some other structure member strong enough to support the door. Perilously, doors are often held open by wire from coat hangers. They should be held opened with fusible links. Fusible links are typically constructed with two pieces of ferrous metal joined by solder. The solder softens or melts when heated, releasing the door. Fusible links also break when there is no fire because they are overloaded.

It is a little known fact that fusible links have a load rating. These vary from two pounds to forty pounds. Too often, a ten-pound rated link is utilized to hold open a twenty-pound door. It works initially, but soon fails. There is apparently no time delay factor related to the load rating, so it is best to install a forty-pound rated fusible link to assure reliability in operation. There should also be self latching locks on the discharge, so the discharge door latches securely when released.

Keeping the doors secured and working correctly takes care of many of the issues associated with a linen chute, allowing huge amounts of linens to be delivered to the laundry quickly. But, what about the laundry itself? Your mother would tell you, "Put that down, you don't know what's on it!" Mom is right. Before laundry employees handle soiled linens from the chute, they should don personal protective equipment. In this case puncture resistant gloves and a moisture resistant apron would be recommended. Leather gloves could be penetrated by a syringe, but will likely resist the needle sufficiently to prevent an injury. An apron will help keep any materials on the linen off the attendant's clothing. Would you want to go home and give your children a hug wearing the same clothes you had been rubbing against soiled linen all day?



Finally, engineering personnel should check each linen chute on a monthly basis to ensure the doors close and latch properly. This will take about thirty seconds per door.

Now, go and be happy. You have a chute and don't have to move soiled linen in heavy carts down the elevator and you can keep this asset from becoming a liability. ✧

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