

# Hospital dismisses company that maintained faulty elevator

By Pam Easton  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

HOUSTON — Christus St. Joseph Hospital said Monday it has dismissed the maintenance company responsible for servicing its elevators when a doctor became trapped between an elevator's doors and a portion of his head was severed.

"The official investigation is still open," Jeff Webster, the hospital's chief executive officer, said. "However, we wanted to communicate the actions the hospital has taken as a result of our own independent investigation."

Dr. Hitoshi Nikaidoh, 35, a surgical resident at the hospital, died Aug. 16 as he entered an elevator on the second floor. According to police reports, the

elevator's doors suddenly closed as he entered, pinning his shoulders. Nikaidoh's head was severed just above his lower jaw when the elevator began rising.

The elevator has been shut down since Nikaidoh's death, the hospital said Monday and new maintenance and inspections companies have been brought in to make sure the hospital's other 44 elevators are running normally.

Webster said the hospital is awaiting a final report from the U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration and from the Texas board that licenses and regulates elevators.

Meanwhile, Nikaidoh's family has sued the company that manufactured the elevator and

Illinois-based Kone, Inc., which was responsible for elevator maintenance at the hospital.

"We're still waiting for the report from the state," the family's attorney, Howard Nations said. "Our position always has been that the only way four safety systems can fail simultaneously is there has to be a wiring problem."

A spokesman for Kone, Inc. wasn't immediately available for comment Monday.

Mike Lubben, a vice president with the company, previously said Kone had been servicing the hospital's elevators since 1999. The Otis elevator in question was installed in 1967.

Lubben said that his company was working with investigators to determine what caused the "tragic accident."

# Smart tags moving rapidly

By Justin Pope  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Backers of new radio-tagged product codes, a kind of souped-up bar code, are heralding this as the week the technology finally moves off the drawing board and into the real world.

Unlike traditional bar codes, Radio Frequency Identification tags do not need to pass under a laser reader. They are already commonly used by drivers with "speed passes" at toll booths, by U.S. military quartermasters and by ranchers tracking livestock from "farm to fork."

But the MIT lab developing the technology, and sponsors such as Wal-Mart, Gillette and Procter & Gamble, are calling a symposium this week in Chicago the beginning of the next step: embedding the chips in shipping crates to help big companies save billions by tracking their products from factory to warehouse to storeroom.

For now, the focus is on helping businesses make sure there is enough product to fill the shelves but not so much as to clog up supply lines or waste away in warehouses. Using RFID to track individual products all the way to the checkout line is further down the

road, when costs come down.

"The symposium is intended to be a bit like a starting pistol for this new technology," said Kevin Ashton, executive director of MIT's AutoID Center. "It's where we cross the line from research to reality."

For some, however, RFID is moving a little too quickly.

The technology got a push this summer when Wal-Mart told its top 100 suppliers to deliver RFID-tagged products by Jan. 1, 2005. With nearly \$700 million in sales per day in 2002, Wal-Mart had the clout to give orders, and the announcement sent suppliers scrambling to respond.

Some of those suppliers, like Procter & Gamble, were already enthusiastically pursuing RFID on their own. A new research report suggests others are feeling rushed to implement it.

They are also worried that if a common set of RFID standards fails to emerge, they will have to build a new system for every customer. And if standards do emerge, they worry they will be forced to share information with competitors.

"With every supplier, there are two camps," said Kara Romanow, an analyst with AMR Research, whose report estimated companies would spend \$2 billion trying to meet the Wal-Mart deadline. "There's the camp that believes the end vision and has really bought into the hype. Then there are the people that are charged with implementing it that are scared."

Some privacy advocates, who contend the technology will soon be used to track people and their personal information, are also worried that RFID is moving too fast.

Katherine Albrecht of the privacy group Caspian said consumer advocates should have been invited to the Chicago symposium to discuss their concerns.

Ashton, of the AutoID center, said that privacy advocates should be part of the debate and that as the technology develops, safeguards will be adopted: Any customers who end up with RFID technology in their hands will be notified, given the option of turning it off, and given control over how any information is used.

The 1,000 people attending the Electronic Product Code symposium are likely to have questions about privacy, as well as standards and the rush by the "Wal-Mart 100" to comply with the company's mandate.

### New wireless way to track inventory

As some companies work to implement the new wireless tracking technology called Radio Frequency Identification (RFID), concerns linger about competing standards, integration costs and consumer privacy. In the system, products are tagged with computer chips that transmit information via radio waves.

**Retail applications for RFID**

- Locates items in stockrooms and identifies where they need to go in the store
- Monitors expiration dates and warns when items need to be removed
- Tracks inventory on the shelves and informs clerk when an item is selling out
- Identifies returned merchandise by date sold, store location or whether or not it was stolen; allows customers to check out by scanning their carts
- Alerts staff when someone is shoplifting

SOURCE: Auto ID Center

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