

Working Safely in Warehouses

A safe, efficient and orderly warehouse is crucial to business success. Warehouses are like the heart of a business—they are the central transfer point, storing and sending raw material or manufactured goods onward to distribution, thereby keeping the pulse of the business beating. Many business operations become impossible without a warehouse.

Warehouses are vital, but they can also be dangerous—because they are a center of activity with a flurry of circulating goods and moving vehicles, they usually have a higher potential for accidents than other areas with more limited functions.

Improving warehouse safety can have a positive effect, streamlining your entire organization. To have a safe, productive warehouse, reduce the following causes of accidents in warehousing and storage.

Slips and Trips

Slips and trips plague all sorts of workplaces, and warehouses are no exception. Although they are usually dismissed as a trivial part of everyday life, slip and trip accidents can be serious and occasionally fatal.

The main cause of slips is a wet or contaminated floor. In warehouses, things like water, oil, cleaning products, dry powders and food can all make the floor more slippery.

You can eliminate a significant portion of your warehouse's slip risk by maintaining your equipment, since properly maintained equipment will not leak onto the floor. If your floor becomes contaminated, establish a policy that requires employees to clean immediately after noticing contamination.

Most warehouse floors have good slip resistance when they are clean and dry, but even a tiny bit of wetness or contamination can make them very slippery. The rougher your floor, the more traction it will provide and the fewer slip accidents it will cause. Footwear that provides increased traction can help limit accidents, but only issue slip-controlling footwear as a last resort—try fixing the root of the problem first.

Trip hazards are more obvious. Objects on the floor,

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uneven surfaces or other trip hazards are usually easier to spot than slip hazards. Like slips, trips can be greatly minimized with diligent housekeeping. Plan your workflows and storage to make sure nothing causes obstructions where people walk. Provide good lighting and check that floor surfaces are even inside and outside the building. If an item does fall onto a traffic route, clear it as soon as possible.

Manual Handling

Employees in every industry, but especially the warehousing and storage industry, experience some kind of minor work-related aches and pains. For warehouse employees, lower back and neck pain can be a common side effect of daily work.

This Title Can Be One Line

Improper manual handling techniques can exacerbate these daily ailments and cause severe, lasting injuries. That is why it is imperative to train your employees in safe manual handling.

Gauge your warehouse's manual handling risks by undertaking a risk assessment for all operations and tasks that present a risk of injury due to manual handling. Consider the following when assessing your warehouse's manual handling risk:

- The task
- The load
- The working environment
- The individual's capacity

The preceding factors will help you determine whether a manual handling task is risky. If there is a manual handling risk, always try to avoid the task first. If you cannot avoid the task, devise a system to reduce your risk, such as using mechanical handling devices or redesigning tasks so goods are not moved manually.

Work at Height

Falls from height can cause extreme, life-altering injuries. For this reason, work at height should be avoided at all costs. However, avoiding work at height is practically impossible in a warehouse. Therefore, as an employer, it is your responsibility to ensure work at height is properly planned, appropriately supervised and safely accomplished.

One easy way to lower your work at height risk is to make sure employees use the right equipment. A risk assessment can identify the best equipment for each type of job. Employees should inspect the equipment used for work at height before and after every task to make sure it is safe.

Vehicles in the Warehouse

One of your biggest risks is unavoidable: vehicles moving in and around the warehouse. The inevitability of vehicle movement requires careful management to lessen the likelihood of accidents.

Because not every driver operating vehicles in and around your warehouse will be familiar with the site, provide them all with copies of your site rules. Include infographics and present information in plain language to make it easier for foreign drivers to understand.

Your site rules should outline routes that are meant for pedestrians and routes that are vehicle-only. Separate vehicles from pedestrians as often as possible. When pedestrians and vehicles must share the same traffic route, invest in adequate separation between them.

Let the following best practices dictate your traffic route planning:

- Minimize the need for reversing.
- Avoid sharp bends and blind corners.
- Maintain your traffic routes—do not allow potholes to develop.
- Forgo any design choices that will harm load stability, such as steep slopes.

Moving or Falling Objects

Most warehouses store objects at height. While this maximizes space, it also raises the chance of workers being struck by falling objects. If your warehouse has areas with an increased risk of an object falling and striking someone, make sure they are clearly indicated and that only authorized people are allowed to enter.

To help keep objects stationary, inspect pallets each time before use to make sure they are in good condition. Damaged pallets can lead to shifting loads and falling objects.

Tailored Insurance Is Best

These five warehouse hazards are just the beginning of a long list. Supplement this guidance with the findings from your own risk assessment and a tailored insurance policy from Peabody Insurance Agency to keep your business protected from the numerous hazards waiting in your warehouse.