

WAREHOUSING

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TARGET → ON SAFETY

Common Warehousing Hazards

Why Should We Be Concerned?

Working in a warehouse is dangerous because of the wide variety of hazards present. The possibility of injury is all around—in any given day, you may work with heavy boxes, powered industrial trucks, docks, conveyor belts and/or hazardous materials. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), about 40 percent of injuries that occur in the warehouse are strains and sprains. The most commonly injured body part is the back, followed by the lower half of the body, which includes legs, knees, feet and toes. BLS data also lists containers as the number one source of warehouse employee injury, followed closely by vehicles, worker motion/position and floor/ground surfaces. Most importantly, employees

overwhelmingly report overexertion as the top exposure causing on-the-job injury.

What do all these numbers and statistics mean to you? They show that injuries occurring in warehouses across the country are common, but they are also preventable. Use the following information to prevent workplace hazards so you and your co-workers can stay safe and healthy on the job.

Help with Housekeeping

One of the most important things you can do to support workplace safety is to keep the warehouse tidy and organized, and encourage co-workers and management to do the same. Housekeeping is a team effort—everyone must address problems right away. Slips and trips because of cluttered, wet

or icy floors are common and can cause serious injury.

Loading Dock Safety

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requires training for lift truck operators to prevent accidents, but other employees who work on or near loading docks but do not operate trucks are rarely trained as thoroughly—even though they encounter many of the same dangers. Though loading dock injuries are not as common as some others are, statistics show they have the highest rate of fatality or devastating injury. Ramps and inclines, overhead obstructions, dissimilar surfaces, slippery conditions, poor lighting, vehicular traffic, pedestrian traffic, restricted views, sheer drops, trailer creep, congested areas and debris accumulation are all

common hazards at the loading dock.

It is essential that everyone follow proper precautions in order to keep the loading dock area as safe as possible. Keep the area clean of debris by designating specific areas to put used pallets, containers and trash. Never stack used pallets or containers too high, especially if there are pedestrians working in the area. Always follow paint or tape markings indicating staging areas, aisles, overhead obstacles, obstructions and loading lanes whether you are walking, operating an industrial vehicle or driving a truck. Most importantly, never climb on docks, place any part of your body outside the dock door, jump down from docks or place yourself between the dock and a trailer. These are the most common causes of loading dock accidents.

Conveyor Belt Dos and Don'ts

In some ways, conveyor belts in the warehouse are safer than manual material handling. They eliminate some of the stress on workers' backs, knees and ankles, and greatly enhance productivity. However, carelessness around conveyor belts also causes hundreds of injuries a year. When working with conveyor belts, you are at risk for pinch-point and crush injuries as well as being trapped between a moving pallet

load and a fixed structure. Also, watch out for sharp edges that cause cuts or bruises and hot parts that could scald or burn. Take these precautions to ensure your safety and health.

First, never perform service on a conveyor unless you have authorization and follow the proper lockout/tagout procedures. Failure to lockout/tagout equipment is one of the biggest and most preventable mistakes employers and workers make. Tie back long hair, do not wear loose clothing or hanging jewelry, and remember to keep clothing, fingers and other body parts away from the conveyor—just because it has guards and safety devices does not mean you cannot be injured.

Hazardous Substances

In a warehouse setting, you face injury or illness potential from vehicle exhaust fumes, cleaning fluids or the stored product itself. To protect yourself, never leave vehicles running in a closed

Always Be Aware

The warehouse often is a hazardous and strenuous working environment, so it is important you are aware of the risks so that you can protect yourself. Taking these simple steps can dramatically increase your chances of staying protected from injury on the job.

setting, always wear proper personal protective equipment (PPE) when cleaning or handling hazardous materials and know the proper OSHA HAZMAT procedures in case of a spill. Also, be sure you know the location of first aid facilities, including the emergency eyewash and shower stations.

Risk of Fire

You may work in a setting where there is bulk storage of materials that ignite or burn easily. Pallets could ignite for a variety of reasons, including electrical fault, smoking on-site or improperly charging equipment batteries. To help lower risk of fire, never smoke in the warehouse, follow all battery-charging precautions and keep open areas free of debris. You should also take precautions in case of fire, including keeping all fire exits clear, making sure they are properly marked and knowing the location of extinguishers.

Industrial Truck Dangers

Industrial trucks present a serious hazard in warehouses, both in terms of driving them and charging their batteries. These vehicles, especially forklifts, are unstable by nature because they carry extremely heavy loads on only one end and have a continually shifting center of gravity. When your load is on the truck, carry it as low as possible with the mast tilted back to shift the weight toward the center of the truck. Lower your speed and drive extra cautiously on ramps, turns and uneven surfaces so your load does not shift unexpectedly.

Warehouse truck equipment can be powered in three ways: gas, propane or battery. For all types of refueling or charging, wear the proper PPE, do not smoke in the vicinity, turn off the vehicle and remove the key. For propane and gas refueling, watch for leaks by detecting a distinct odor, a hissing sound or frost on fittings. If you suspect a leak, address it immediately. For battery charging, always inspect connectors for damage and clean up battery acid spills immediately. Equipment charging is a serious task, and you should not perform this duty unless you are thoroughly trained to do so.

Ergonomics 101

As you know, your job involves lots of heavy lifting, bending and twisting, and these are motions

that can lead to serious injury. The best idea is to avoid these motions when possible, but they are often necessary due to the nature of your job. Besides practicing proper lifting technique, it is important to use conveyors and machinery whenever safe and feasible to reduce the stress on your body. Otherwise, the ideal is a one-touch system. Avoid moving and shifting products around more times than necessary. When possible, lift the product once and set it in its proper place so other people do not have to lift it again later.