

How Safe Is Your Warehouse?

Warehouse operations are common with most manufacturing businesses, and present a wide variety of potential hazards for your employees and vendors. Generally, very little training is conducted to recognize these potential hazards. When we review our warehouse losses, we find the most frequent injuries and losses occur in the loading dock area, during forklift operations, and employee lifting and material handling.



Loading docks or staging areas are common areas in a warehouse where injuries and damage to products occur. Common hazards include:

- Product falling onto employees' head, feet, arms, and legs;
- Weak housekeeping programs that result in congestion;
- Employees jumping from a high elevation to a lower elevation;
- Lifting dock plates and constantly adjusting them; and
- Forklift or pallet jacks rolling off the dock.

Controls include:

- Securing dock plates so they don't roll over;
- Conducting daily inspections of loads and temporary storage arrangements;
- Never allowing a forklift or pallet jack to back to the edge of the dock;
- Enforcing safety rules about employee movement from higher dock elevations to the lower ground surface; and
- Monitoring assigned safety inspection forms

Warehouse employees will use forklifts and pallet jacks routinely throughout the day. The common hazards associated with use of this equipment include:

- Obstructed view;
- Speeding;
- Moisture on the working surface (ice, water, oil);
- Blind corners;
- Insufficient lighting;
- Traffic patterns;
- Temporary storage areas inside and outside;
- Lack of proper maintenance and self inspections; and
- Operator's mind is not on the task at hand.

Controls include:

- Monitoring operators' speed around blind corners and use of horns when approaching intersections and while backing up when their vision is obstructed;
- Never allowing anyone to ride on any part of the equipment if the equipment isn't designed for riding the forks, the rear compartment area, or rollover protection;
- Not allowing operators to ride on forks while lifting or trying to retrieve products vertically;
- Receiving proper training and wearing a body harness for fall protection if the operator must ride vertically on a forklift that was designed for this use;

- Marking all high-hazard areas with signage and/or installing convex mirrors to allow pedestrians and operators to see around obstructed corners or intersections; and
- Providing frequent safety talks with your forklift operators and all employees who work around this equipment.

Even though forklifts, pallet jacks, and other mechanical lifting devices are made available, employees will occasionally be required to manually move product from one location to another. These are common hazards:

- Neck and shoulder strains and low back injuries;
- Foot and ankle injuries;
- Slips and falls;
- Injuries caused by being struck with an object; and
- Strains due to reaching into low areas.

Controls include:

- Keeping aisles clear so employees can move material without hitting equipment or personnel;
- Using hand carts and dollies whenever other mechanical equipment cannot be used;
- Providing industrial stairs so employees don't climb shelving or use other make-shift items as stairs;
- Monitoring stacking heights and inspecting the stability of the stacked product;
- Staging grab bars or hooks so employees can slide products closer to the safe lifting zone; and
- Conducting employee safety training on lifting and material handling.

The practice of recognizing hazards in warehouse operations is often overlooked until a serious injury or fatality occurs. By focusing your efforts on recognizing those hazards on loading docks, and during forklift operation and material handling, your warehouse will be more productive and employees will avoid serious injuries.

For more information about warehouse safety, please contact the West Bend's Loss Prevention Department.

