Loading Docks Meeting Kit

LOADING DOCK ISSUES

Loading docks almost always have certain hazards present—and these hazards have the potential to be deadly. From small businesses to huge warehouses, employees working around loading docks are often at risk of injury.

When semi-trucks arrive at the loading dock to drop off or pick up inventory, a team of dock workers springs into action. It can get busy, as employees look to complete their assigned tasks as soon as possible without damaging the product or hurting anyone.

RISKS/ DANGERS THAT LOADING DOCK WORKERS FACE

Loading and receiving docks are designed to facilitate smooth and efficient handling of shipping materials. Most docks have three basic machines to ensure this process is as productive as possible—trucks, forklifts, and cargo lines. Unfortunately, malfunctions or miscalculations with any one of these three pieces of equipment can lead to spectacular consequences.

Trucks. The majority of loading docks depend on semi trucks to deliver and receive cargo. This probably comes as no surprise. However, as with any truck, the potential for a collision is always possible. When it comes to loading docks, this risk is higher than normal as loading areas are located in specific locations and require drivers to back into them so that trailer doors can be accessed. As a result, in addition to common truck risks such as instability and cargo shifts, the driver must also place his focus on precisely maneuvering the trailer, so it is flush with the dock’s bay door. Any miscalculation during this procedure can potentially cause the truck to jackknife, roll over, crush bystanders, or leave a dangerous gap between the trailer and door where loaders may fall or get stuck.

Forklifts. When you're working on a loading dock, you'll commonly use forklifts to carry loads that are too large or heavy for a single person to handle. Although these lifts are helpful in preventing muscle strains and overexertion, they also greatly increase the chance of an accident. Forklifts can drive right off the loading dock due to driver error, mechanical failure, the weather, or because of the negligence of another person. Forklift operators are also at risk of "trailer creep," which is caused by the lateral and vertical forces exerted every time a forklift enters and exits the truck. This causes the truck to slowly move away from the dock, resulting in separation from the dock leveler.

Cargo lines. Cargo lines are basically conveyor belts on wheels. They're stretched between the truck and loading area and are used as a transport system to easily move cargo in and out of the trailer. However, since a conveyor belt has moving parts, whether mechanical, spring loaded, or rotary, it has the potential to pinch and pull workers. Furthermore, when boxes and cargo move too fast, they can fall or crash into line workers, causing severe crush injuries and muscle sprains.

HOW WORKERS CAN AVOID INJURY

Before anyone enters the trailer, employees—not the truck driver—must secure the trailer with a wheel restraint device. The restraint system is designed to limit forward movement of a trailer, but doesn't always eliminate it. Employees need to monitor the trailer for movement throughout the loading and unloading process, and reposition the trailer when a gap forms.

Secure the Vehicles

Before loading and unloading, make sure to use vehicle restraints to secure trucks to the dock and forklifts away from the open bay doors with the common restraint systems.

- **Wheel chocks:** Wedge-shaped blocks placed in front of the rear wheels of a trailer.
- **Wheel-based restraints:** Mounted to the dock approach, these are designed to engage the rear tire of the trailer and hold

it in place
- **Automated restraint:** Mounted on the outside wall beneath the dock's opening, a hook automatically extends and wraps around the rear impact guard on a trailer.

If the wheel chocks are being used, workers must make their way to the ground below the dock and place the chocks in front of the rear tires of the vehicle, before any work begins inside the trailer.

If a wheel-based or automated system is being used, check to make sure the system has engaged securely.

Because the restraint method is not 100 percent trailer-creep proof, workers will need to pay close attention throughout the day to where the dock and trailer meet—specifically watching for **trailer creep.**

Make note of any gaps—regardless of how small—and communicate this information to coworkers and supervisors.

TRAINING AND MORE TRAINING

Safe work on loading docks requires various types of training, from forklift certification and LOTO procedures to teaching employees how to secure loads, maintain equipment and lift correctly.

Training must be engaging and memorable. Hours of dry classroom sessions on procedures and regulations are unlikely to stick in workers' minds. Organizations should consider different training approaches and new ways of teaching.

LOADING DOCK SAFETY TAKEAWAYS

The most common safety hazards facing workers occur when forklifts run off the dock, products fall on employees or equipment strikes a person. Solutions include the following:

- Drive forklifts slowly on docks and dock plates

- Secure dock plates and check to see if the plate can safely support the load
- Keep clear of dock edges and never back up forklifts to the dock’s edge
- Provide visual warnings near dock edges;
- Prohibit “dock jumping”
- Make sure that dock ladders and stairs meet OSHA specifications.
- Maintain a safe distance as the truck backs into the loading area.
- Highlight the danger zones. Use brightly colored paint to designate the dangerous areas around the dock.
- Maintain a clean work environment. Try to keep all work surfaces clean and clear of any debris.
- Encourage patience and safety.
- Maintain all equipment. Make sure all equipment is in working order before you start the loading or unloading.

FINAL WORD

Workplace safety cannot exist on best practice guidelines and policies alone. A safe working environment is based on how well the people, in both management and on the dock floor, adhere to and communicate about workplace hazards like trailer creep, and encourage each other to take the steps to prevent injury.