Warehouse Safety

CONVEYOR SYSTEMS

In some warehouses, products are placed on conveyor systems that transport them to different areas of the facility. To prevent pinch point or entanglement injuries, workers should have their hair covered or secured and keep all body parts away from moving conveyor belts and wheels. Elevated conveyors should have safety nets to prevent products from dropping onto workers below. Workers should be trained in the proper lockout/tagout procedures for servicing conveyors and be informed of the location of the on/off and emergency stop buttons for immediate access.

MATERIAL HANDLING AND STORAGE

Large, awkward, and/or heavy products are a challenge to warehouse safety. These products require slow and careful placement on shelving to prevent displacing other products and causing them to fall off shelves and possibly onto workers or customers below. They should be stored flat within the shelving units keeping aisle ways clear. Storage shelves and racking systems must be sturdy, braced, and spacious enough to allow for the safe movement of workers and equipment. Pallets used for stacking products should also be sturdy and in good condition; damaged pallets should be replaced. Shrink-wrapping or baling products increase their stability; unstable pallet items should be restacked.

FORKLIFTS AND PALLET JACKS

Forklifts (powered industrial trucks) and pallet jacks are often used to move products around a warehouse. Forklift operators must be specifically trained and certified; whereas pallet jack operators require general training in vehicle operation.

The load on a forklift or pallet should not exceed the equipment’s capacity. Before slowly lifting and deliberately moving the load to its predetermined location, it should be adequately stabilized.

Forklifts and pallet jacks should never be used to transport or lift workers.

GOOD HOUSEKEEPING

Good housekeeping in a warehouse includes keeping dirt, oil, and debris off of loading docks and indoor floors. Floors should be constructed of non-slip surfaces without pits, cracks, dents. Walkways and ramps should be free of curled mats or friction strips and loose cables.

Miscellaneous boxes, baling materials, trash, and other recyclables should be removed from traffic areas and properly stored or disposed.

LOADING DOCKS

Products commonly enter and exit warehouses by way of trucks and loading docks; loading docks that are usually elevated. When loading and unloading material from the docks and ramps, workers must pay special attention to where they are walking to avoid falls. Painting yellow strips along the edge of a loading dock can alert workers to a potential fall area. Truck movement around loading docks presents inherent hazards, so, workers should be constantly aware of the trucks and maintain a safe distance from them. The area between the truck and the dock is especially dangerous as a backing truck could cause a crushing injury. Once parked, truck wheels should be chocked for unloading activities.

PERSONAL PROTECTION

Warehouse workers can protect themselves on the job by wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) such as steel- toed shoes, gloves, and hard hats or bump caps. Practicing proper lifting techniques can protect a worker’s back from strain or sprain injuries. Lifting warehouse items properly also keeps the load from shifting, falling or crushing fingers, hands and toes.

Warehouses can range in size from large wholesale product distribution centers to smaller retail operations that sell

oversized and bulk products. Whether working in an industrial, commercial or retail facility, warehouse workers should follow the safety guidelines for: loading docks, conveyor systems, forklifts and pallet jacks, material handling and storage, personal protection, and housekeeping. If workers are trained in warehouse hazard recognition and prevention, and follow recommended safety procedures, they can count on a safe and productive warehouse experience.