Loading Dock Safety

The hazards facing employees who work on loading docks present special safety issues. Workers must not only be careful about what they are doing, but they must also be aware of others working around them, particularly of co-workers using various forms of material-handling equipment.

Loading dock hazards include:

• Slips caused by wet or oily floors;
• Falls from dock edges;
• Falls caused by unsecured dock plates;
• Carbon monoxide exposure from truck and powered material-handling equipment;
• Back injuries from improper lifting or carrying;
• Head and eye injuries from falling objects;
• Hearing damage from a loud noise level; and
• Injuries from careless operation of material handling equipment.

Preventing slips, trips and falls

Not surprisingly, slips, trip, and falls are among the most common types of loading dock accidents. With so much activity, materials and equipment around, employees are at risk of injury unless precautions are taken to manage the area to promote safety.

Make sure to address these concerns whenever they arise.

• Spills, leaks and wet areas need to be cleaned up immediately.
• Cracks, holes or other damage to flooring needs to be repaired.
• Dock plates must be properly placed.
• Containers, packaging and tools must be kept out of the way.
• Trash must be removed from the area and disposed of properly.
• Employees must be encouraged to watch where they're walking and to stay clear of dock edges.
• Horseplay and other unsafe behavior, such as jumping onto or off the loading dock must be firmly discouraged.

Employees must also be taught how to use material-handling equipment safely. For example, they should know how to load a hand truck safely so that it is well balanced and the load is secure.

Safety precautions required around vehicles

Some loading dock injuries occur when employees are hit by powered material-handling equipment operating in the area. Other accidents occur because trucks and trailers are not properly secured and shut down.

Rules for vehicle safety should include the following:

• Truck drivers must turn off their engines to prevent carbon monoxide release.
• Equipment operators (not truck drivers) must check to see that truck wheels are chocked (they're the ones who could be injured).
• Loading dock employees are prohibited from riding on material handling equipment or distracting the operators.
• Loading dock employees must pay attention to power vehicles and other material-handling equipment and keep out of the way.

With a little bit of awareness, training and enforcement of safe practices, your loading dock can be a safe place for all employees who work there.

Keep loading dock hazards at bay

To prevent injuries on loading docks, follow the rules printed on the following checklist.

Prevent slips, trips, and falls

__ Walk don't run.
__ Stay away from dock edges.
__ Don't jump onto or off a loading dock.
__ Don't indulge in horseplay.
__ Don't clutter walking and driving areas.
__ Pick up trash and dispose of it properly.
__ Clean up or report spills, leaks or wet areas immediately.
__ Report any holes, cracks, or other damage in flooring.
__ Secure movable dock boards.
__ Watch where you're going.

Prevent vehicle accidents

__ Turn off truck engines to prevent release of carbon monoxide.
__ Be sure truck wheels are chocked.
__ Don't ride on material handling equipment or distract operators.
__ Don't stand under the forks of a power vehicle, even if the forks are empty.
__ Keep alert to power vehicles moving around you.
__ Get out of the way of equipment.

Prevent lifting and loading injuries

__ Lift only what you can carry without strain. Otherwise, get a helper, a hand truck or other material-handling aid.
__ Lift properly: Bend your knees and lift with your legs to save your back.
__ Use the same technique for unloading materials.
__ Balance hand truck loads with heavy objects on the bottom.
__ Keep the load weight forward, over the axle.
__ Keep hand truck loads at a height you can see over.