

Loading dock safety

By Amy Stewart

Before you begin

How safe is your loading dock? What are typical causes of loading dock accidents, incidents and events? What do we check to prevent loading dock accidents? Through group discussion, the workers will raise each others' awareness of hazards and safe practices around loading docks. Loading dock safety should include hazard identification, safety committee discussions, peer-to-peer feedback and employee suggestions. The discussion leader should provide feedback on employee suggestions to upper management where appropriate.



Warm-up exercise – Group discussion

- (1) List types of loading dock hazards.
- (2) Discuss the methods used to compensate for hazards.
- (3) Discuss how you can improve safety in the following three categories:
 - Warehouse or loading dock facility;
 - Cargo damage;
 - Vehicle movement during loading or unloading.

What can we do?

Ask the group to list the leading causes of fatalities in loading dock areas. Examples include a worker being crushed by an overturned forklift, a fall from a loading dock.

Ask what contributing factors lead to these events, and what can be done to prevent incidents? Answers include policies and procedures, education/training, lighting, barriers, enforcement, engineering, visual/audible alarms/sensors.

Is there anything we should do about a vacant loading dock, or if the dock door is open for ventilation?

- Close dock doors to secure the docking area when not in use.
- Erect barriers.
- Re-route pedestrian traffic.
- Install sensors.

Cargo

- How could a fire start in the loading dock area, and what should be done to prevent fires? (Trailer marker lights against the building; cargo; electrical shorts; smoking – non-flammable materials, frequent inspection, retardant)
- Describe the procedures for preventing trailer tip-overs, upending or landing gear collapse. (Trailer restraint system, inspect movement before adding to the load) (Leave coupled where appropriate, consider trailer restraint system)

Vehicle movement

- Newer trailer designs, such as air-ride trailers, lower profile tires and low-bed trailers might require special handling procedures. What hazards are created with these new designs and what can be done to compensate?
 - Mechanic or hydraulic levelers, ramps, vs. ski-slope effect
- Identify ways communication is used in the loading dock area, from signage to audible/visual alarms, to signaling devices or gestures.
 - Wear bright colors; promote employee contribution, policy and enforcement of posted safe rules and operating procedures; conduct proper training; and use proper equipment.
- Unscheduled departure: Examine why premature dock/trailer separation occurs.
 - In a hurry; time is money. Take positive action to prevent a driver's attempt to make a premature, unscheduled departure.
- Do wheel chocks and setting brakes entirely eliminate trailer creep? If not, why not and what can be done to prevent creep?
 - Leave tractor cab attached to trailer or vehicle restraints are other considerations.

Action steps

Individual

Workers must not only be mindful of what they are doing, but also be aware of the actions of those around them, especially forklifts and other forms of material handling equipment. Although this lesson is not all-inclusive of every specific hazard at loading docks, all employees must raise their awareness of the risks associated with working around loading docks and should look to identify opportunities for improvement.

Group

Safety committee – Working with the check list, design a list of improvements that can be made in the loading dock area, and prioritize, beginning with minimal cost to “super-size” involving major upper-management investment.

Tailor a training program for all employees who enter or work in any capacity in the loading dock area, and include procedure, rules and guidelines for keeping injury/fatality/damage-free.

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We always strive to improve the *Safety Leader's Discussion Guide*. Your feedback can help. Please send your comments via e-mail to Safety@ohiobwc.com.

References

Regulations

- 29 CFR 1910.178 (Powered Industrial Trucks)
- 49 CFR 393.106 (Front End Structure Subpart I, Protection Against Shifting or Falling Cargo)
- 49 CFR 393.40 (Required Brake Systems)
- 49 CFR 393.41 (Parking Brake Systems)

Web sites

- Forklift Operator Dies After Backing his Forklift Off a Loading Dock (New Jersey Dept. of Health and Senior Services): www.state.nj.us/health/surv/documents/02nj081.pdf
- Loading dock safety checklist (Workers' Compensation Fund, Utah): www.wcgroup.com/sites/default/files/LoadingDockChecklist.pdf
- Dock Safety Is Everyone's Responsibility (Materials Handling & Management Society, Ontario, Canada): www.mhmsontario.com/docksafetymay2001.pdf
- Loading dock safety products and information (Rite-Hite): www.ritehite.com

Books and Articles

- Swartz, George. *Warehouse safety: A practical guide to preventing warehouse incidents and injuries*. Government Institutes, 1999
- Utt, Kirby, "Loading Dock Safety Summary," *Central Ohio ASSE Newsletter*, March 2004