

Warehouse Safety

What can be more dangerous than walking through a minefield in a war zone? Sometimes, entering a busy warehouse can feel just as hazardous if proper safety procedures are not followed.

Most employees do not stop to think about the dangers that can exist inside a warehouse. However, many workers have learned the hard way—often through accidents or near misses—that warehouses contain serious hazards requiring constant attention and awareness.

Forklift Safety

One of the most common hazards in a warehouse is forklift traffic. Forklifts are constantly moving throughout warehouses and lumber yards, often carrying heavy or oversized loads. Only trained and certified operators are permitted to operate forklifts. This means:

- No untrained employees or supervisors
- No customers
- No one under the age of 18

Forklift operation requires skill, awareness, and focus. Unfortunately, distractions can quickly create dangerous situations. Customers and visitors may unknowingly enter restricted areas, children may wander into work zones, and employees may become distracted while walking through operational areas.

Forklift-related accidents continue to occur every year, many resulting in serious injuries or fatalities. Operators must always check their surroundings before moving equipment, while pedestrians must remain alert and avoid distracted walking, including texting while in operational areas.

Chemical Safety

Another major warehouse hazard involves chemical storage and handling. Products such as paints, thinners, pool chemicals, stains, varnishes, and cleaning agents can create fire, spill, inhalation, or burn hazards if mishandled.

Safety Data Sheets (SDS), formerly known as MSDS sheets, must be maintained for all chemical products stored onsite. These sheets should be readily accessible to employees and reviewed whenever a new chemical product is received.

Employees should understand:

- Proper spill cleanup procedures
- Required personal protective equipment (PPE)

- Whether water can safely be used during cleanup
- Fire response procedures
- When emergency services should be contacted

In the event of a chemical spill or damaged container, employees must respond according to established procedures and notify supervision immediately. Quick access to SDS information can help prevent panic, injuries, and unnecessary emergency response costs.

Warehouse Inspections and Housekeeping

A strong inspection and maintenance program is essential to warehouse safety. Regular inspections should include:

- Forklifts and powered equipment
- Storage racks and mezzanines
- Chemical storage areas
- Loading docks
- Emergency exits and fire extinguishers
- Walking and driving aisles

Forklifts should be inspected before each shift or use. Emergency exits must always remain clear and accessible. Aisles should be free from obstruction and clearly marked where pedestrian and forklift traffic may intersect.

Mezzanines and loading docks must have proper guardrails and fall protection to prevent falls from elevated surfaces. Chemical storage areas should be inspected frequently for leaks or spills that could create slip hazards, equipment issues, or fire risks.

Fire extinguishers should be inspected regularly and documented at least monthly to ensure they are ready for emergency use.

Final Thoughts

Warehouse safety depends on awareness, training, communication, and accountability from every employee. If you are unsure about any procedure or workplace hazard, contact your supervisor and request additional training.

The life you protect may be your own—or someone else's.