

Warehouse Safety

What can be more dangerous than walking through a mine field in a war zone? Entering the depths of a warehouse. Most employees don't stop to think about the dangers that lurk behind that steel metal structure, but some workers have discovered the hard way, usually by accident, so to speak.

All of us have seen the forklifts scurrying around the warehouse and lumber supply yards. We know that not all persons are allowed to operate a forklift. It takes a trained and certified operator to handle the controls, no un-trained supervisors, no customers, and no person under the age of 18. It isn't easy; we try to do our job and some customer's kid leaves the vehicle and wants dad to do a show-and-tell adventure with something fascinating in the storage racks. We hear about forklift deaths 2-3 times per month in the local news. Or sometimes the fatality victim is a distracted office employee texting while walking thru the danger zone and operator that didn't check behind before moving; sometimes it's the customer's kid that got loose.

Another danger in the warehouse is containers of chemical products- paints & thinners, pool cleaning products, stains & varnishes, etc. The warehouse needs to keep MSDS (material safety data sheets) on all chemical products. The MSDSs should be kept in a safe place accessible if needed in case of an accidental spillage or fire. It is prudent to review the MSDS immediately upon the arrival of a chemical product. If spillage occurs or a forklift accidentally gaffs a acid container, all employees in the area need to know- what is the clean-up procedure, what safety equipment is required, can we use water, what if it catches fire, do we call 911 for help, etc. The MSDS sheet for the chemical can answer most all the questions. Oh, by the way, it is hard to speed read when the air smells of a toxic acid. Most people turn, run and call 911. And 911 is a very expensive call if it is something workers can clean up themselves.

Most importantly, have an inspection system in place for the building, forklifts, racks & mezzanines, chemical area, and any other hazardous area. We want to insure everyone's safety by checking each forklift before it is placed into operation. We want to insure all exit doors are clear for exit in an emergency. Aisle ways should be clear for safe travel and distinctly marked if forklifts and people may be traveling the same path. Mezzanines and loading docks should be properly guarded from workers falling more than 4 feet. Chemical areas should be checked frequently for leakage that may cause slip & falls, forklift slippage, or a fire. And don't take for granted the fire extinguishers. They need to be checked periodically and a documented inspection at least monthly.

Do you feel a little more warm and fuzzy about entering the warehouse? If not, contact your supervisor and seek additional training. The life you save, may be your own.