

Warehouse safety

You may have seen, over the years, an increase in warehouse operations in your area. This is due to the industry's significant growth since 2011. According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), warehousing and distribution facilities have experienced a surge in employment from 668,900 to 1,713,900. The study included industries in warehousing and distribution centers, mail/postal processing and distribution centers and parcel delivery/courier services. Unfortunately, the increase in employment has also shown an increase in employee injuries.

From 2017 to 2021, the average incidence rate of nonfatal occupational injuries and illnesses and the average days away restricted or transferred rate (also known as DART) were significantly higher than the private general industry rate. The Private Industry Rate showed a recordable case rate of 2.76 and a total DART rate of 1.6. The warehouse industry average showed a total recordable case rate of 4.17 and a total DART rate of 3.64. Check to see how your Injury and DART Rate compare.

With the increase in injuries, it is essential to ensure you have implemented the appropriate safety programs and trained employees on hazard identification and resolution. To get an idea of what those warehouse hazards are, OSHA performed several inspections over the years and came up with the following areas of concern: powered industrial vehicles; slip, trip, and fall hazards; blocked aisles/means of egress; heat hazards; and ergonomic hazards. Although this is only part of the list, it can help provide a starting point for identification of hazards in your organization.

Below are some potential solutions to those hazards.

1. Powered Industrial Vehicles (PIV's) Hazards
 - a. All employees operating PIVs must be adequately trained.
 - b. Never exceed the rated load of the PIV and ensure it is stable.
 - c. Watch for pedestrians and observe the speed limit.
 - d. Use horns at cross aisles and obstructed areas.
 - e. Never, ever give rides to passengers.
2. Slips, Trips and Fall Hazards
 - a. Train workers on fall protection systems and ensure they are appropriately used.
 - b. Keep floors and aisles clear of trip hazards such as cords, pallets, boxes and hoses.
 - c. Ensure spills or wet areas are cleaned up as soon as possible.
 - d. Ladders should be inspected before use and always used properly. Do not allow ladders to be used as platforms or placed on boxes, barrels or pallets to obtain additional height.
3. Blocked Aisles/Means of Egress Hazards
 - a. Fire extinguishers, eye wash/safety shower stations and electrical boxes should always remain clear and accessible. Best management practices suggest three feet of clearance.
 - b. Ensure exit doors are kept clear in the event of an evacuation.
 - c. Check emergency lighting for proper functionality.
4. Heat Hazards
 - a. New and returning workers should gradually be acclimated into the workplace to build a tolerance to the heat.
 - b. Provide breaks that include water or electrolytes and cool/shaded areas.
 - c. Train workers on the symptoms and dangers of heat hazards, such as heat stress or heat exhaustion and the steps to take for proper medical assistance.
5. Ergonomic Hazards
 - a. Ensure employees understand proper lifting techniques and weight limitations.
 - b. Review and train employees on the need for material handling equipment to assist in lifting objects.

- c. Train employees on the signs and symptoms of Musculoskeletal Disorders (MSDs). MSDs include injuries such as carpal tunnel syndrome, trigger finger and epicondylitis.

Employers can create a secure environment that promotes employee well-being and enhances overall operation efficiency by prioritizing warehouse safety through training, communication, and proactive measures. Regular reviews and updates to safety protocols are essential to adapt to changing circumstances and technologies.

As final note, OSHA has placed warehouse safety as one of their National Emphasis Programs or NEP's. NEP's are designed to focus OSHA's resources on particular hazards and high-hazard industries. For further information on the OSHA NEP for Warehouse Safety, go to:

https://www.osha.gov/sites/default/files/enforcement/directives/CPL_03-00-026.pdf.

If you need help identifying potential hazards in your workplace, please contact Andy Sawan, Risk Services Specialist at Sedgwick at andrew.sawan@sedgwick.com or 330-819-4728.