

LOADING DOCK SAFETY

COURSE OUTLINE

- **A loading dock can be a very busy place.**
 - It's an area where trucks, trailers, workers and materials handling equipment all come together, loading and unloading... lifting and carrying... positioning and stacking.
- **A loading dock full of hustle and bustle is a sign of a healthy business, but all that activity can also be dangerous.**
 - The loading and unloading operations that are performed on a loading dock often need to be done quickly, and in very tight spaces.
 - Conditions like these tend to increase the hazards that workers are exposed to.
- **Thousands of injuries occur on loading docks every year, but there are procedures we can all follow to help us stay safe when we're on a dock.**
- **Before you head out to work on a loading dock, you need to make sure that you're wearing the appropriate personal protective equipment. At the very least you should have:**
 - Sturdy work boots with non-slip soles and steel toes to protect you from falls and dropped objects.
 - Gloves to guard your hands against abrasive or splintery surfaces.
- **A hardhat or bump cap can also be important, to protect your head from falling objects or bumping into things in tight spaces.**
 - You may need to wear eye protection, a dust mask, cold weather gear or other PPE in some situations as well.
- **All loading docks include a raised platform that gives access to trucks, trailers and other transport vehicles for convenient loading and unloading.**
 - These platforms tend to be crowded.
 - Because they are "off the ground", they have a built-in falling hazard.
- **Remember to think "safety first" on a loading dock.**
 - Walk, don't run.
 - Watch where you're going.

- **Stay alert for any materials handling equipment that may be operating nearby.**
 - The drivers of forklifts and pallet trucks may not always see you, so it's important to keep well clear of them.
 - Don't let moving equipment pin you against a wall or a fixed object like a bollard, or push you off the edge of the dock!
- **These machines can also turn very sharply, and when they do, their back ends swing out wide.**
 - So keep your distance so they don't hit you.
- **Watch out for their forks as well.**
 - Because they can travel close to the ground, machines' forks can sometimes be hard to see.
- **Stay out of trucks and trailers when they are being loaded or unloaded by powered equipment.**
- **Never work, stand or walk under a raised load.**
- **Whenever you use equipment such as a dolly, pallet jack or forklift, proceed slowly and use caution.**
 - Watch out for other people and give them the right of way.
- **Don't stack material so high that you have trouble seeing where you're going.**
 - Make sure the load is stable and secure so it won't fall off, get damaged or hurt somebody.
- **Never ride a manual pallet jack like a scooter, or try to "hitch a ride" on powered equipment.**
- **When a truck pulls into your loading dock, remember that the cargo inside may have shifted while in transit.**
 - Stand back from the doors when they are first opened, so you don't get hit if something comes tumbling out.
- **When loading and unloading, people often hurt their backs because they do their lifts incorrectly, or try to lift something that's too heavy.**

- **You should always follow safe lifting procedures.**
 - Lower yourself by bending at the knees.
 - Keep your back straight.
 - Then lift the load gradually, with your leg muscles.
- **Don't try to lift heavy or awkward loads by yourself.**
 - Ask a coworker to give you a hand, or use a dolly or hand cart.
- **Slips, trips and falls are involved in many of the accidents that occur on a loading dock, but you can avoid these hazards by following a few safe work practices.**
 - To start, good housekeeping can help prevent slips, trips and falls.
- **Whether the dock you're working on is inside or outside, you should keep an eye on the weather.**
 - Be prepared to clear away any rainwater, snow or ice that accumulates or finds its way inside.
- **Liquid spills and build-ups of grease and grime can also create slip hazards on a dock.**
 - Make sure these substances are cleaned off all surfaces as soon as possible.
- **The same goes for any clutter that could get underfoot.**
 - Don't leave containers, empty pallets or tools lying around.
 - Put them away where they belong.
- **Pick up discarded packaging materials, trash and debris and dispose of it properly.**
- **Slip and trip hazards can also be created by wear or damage to a loading dock's surface.**
 - If you see holes, cracks, loose flooring or similar problems, report them to your supervisor immediately, so they can be repaired.
- **The surfaces of most loading docks are elevated from 44" to 48" inches off the ground.**
 - Whether you're working outside on an "open" dock or inside on a "flush" or "enclosed" dock, this raised platform creates a significant fall hazard.
 - Always stay away from the edge of a dock, and watch where you're going.

- **Flush docks can be especially hazardous since the doors are at the very edge of the dock.**
 - To prevent accidents, doors should be kept shut when the dock is not in use.
 - If the doors need to be open to improve ventilation, barriers should be installed to prevent falls.
- **If the vertical drop from any type of dock measures more than 48" inches, OSHA requires that a protective guardrail be installed.**
 - For shorter drops, visual barriers such as chains or plastic webbing are acceptable.
- **When making your way around a dock, don't jump onto or off of it to "get there faster".**
 - "Dock jumping" is risky behavior that can often lead to knee injuries... or a lot worse.
- **When a truck or trailer is parked at a loading dock, special equipment is used to bridge the gap between the dock and the vehicle, and even out any height difference between them.**
 - "Dock plates" and "dock boards" are portable units that can be installed as needed.
 - "Dock levelers" are heavy-duty units that are built into the edge of the dock itself.
- **It's important to watch your step around this equipment because it can create trip hazards.**
- **Dock plates and boards should rest securely in place, with at least eight inches of overlap onto both the dock and the truck or trailer floor.**
 - Dock levelers should extend fully into the vehicle.
- **The height difference between a loading dock and a trailer floor can sometimes result in these "bridges" sloping between the two surfaces.**
 - Operating materials handling equipment on too steep a slope can cause the equipment to get hung up, or even spill the load.
 - A slope as little as seven degrees can create a problem.
 - If you think a bridge's grade might be too steep, consult your supervisor before you drive any equipment across it!

- **When you've finished the loading or unloading process:**
 - Dock plates and boards should be removed and stored out of the way for future use.
 - Dock levelers should be retracted flush with the surface of the dock so no one trips over them.
- **Different types of vehicles pull up at loading docks for loading and unloading, including vans, panel trucks, tractor-trailers, even rail cars.**
 - For work to proceed safely, it's very important for all of them to be secured at the dock.
- **When docked vehicles are not secured, they can be prone to a hazard known as "trailer creep", also called "dock walk".**
 - Trailer creep results from the loading and unloading activity inside the vehicle itself.
- **For example, every time a forklift enters a trailer and puts on its brakes, the momentum gives the trailer a little push forward.**
 - This can cause a gap to open up between the trailer and the dock.
 - Serious injuries, even fatalities, can result if dock workers or equipment fall into the gap.
- **To help prevent trailer creep, drivers of vehicles that arrive at a dock are expected to turn off their engines and set the parking brakes.**
- **If a forklift or motorized pallet truck will be used in the unloading process, OSHA regulations also require the vehicle's wheels to be chocked.**
 - It's important to remember that wheel chocks are not foolproof.
 - Activity in the vehicle can still dislodge them.
- **Whenever possible, trucks and trailers should be secured using a "mechanical restraint system", which is usually built into the dock itself.**
 - These devices secure the vehicle by locking around its rear axle or bumper.
- **A semi-trailer that has been parked and left behind at a dock by its tractor, or "dropped", can pose a special type of hazard.**

- **If the trailer's landing legs are weak or damaged, the combination of the load's weight and activity inside the trailer can cause them to collapse.**
 - This can result in the trailer falling forward, and sometimes to the side as well.
- **"Trailer tipover" is not only hazardous to anyone inside the trailer, but also opens up a hazardous gap at the rear that people and equipment could fall into.**
 - To prevent a tipover, jack stands may need to be installed under the front end of a trailer to provide extra support while it's parked.
- **Another type of problem, called "early departure", can occur when a driver mistakenly pulls their vehicle away from a dock while loading or unloading is still going on.**
- **Early departure can cause workers and machinery to fall off the back of the vehicle, resulting in serious injuries. To prevent this:**
 - Some facilities hold onto a driver's keys until the loading or unloading of their vehicle is completed.
 - Others place caution flags at the front of the vehicle, or use caution lights connected to the dock's restraint system.
- **Loading dock personnel can do their part to ensure no misunderstandings occur by taking the time to communicate clearly with drivers while their vehicles are at a dock.**
- **Securing railway cars is a very specialized process.**
 - If you dock rail cars at your facility, ask your supervisor for more information about what procedures you should follow.
- **Dock employees who drive forklifts and motorized pallet trucks will have received training in the OSHA regulations that apply to their equipment, as well as how to operate it safely and effectively on a dock.**
 - On a busy and crowded loading dock, there can be additional considerations and hazards to watch out for.
- **Working safely with this equipment on a dock requires you to always stay alert, use caution and follow safe operating procedures to the letter.**
 - You should drive the equipment slowly, at no faster than a walking pace.
 - Watch out for pedestrians and give them the right of way.

- **Remember that pedestrians may not be familiar with how forklifts and pallet trucks move.**
 - When you're operating in their vicinity, be mindful of how your vehicle swings when you change direction.
- **Whether or not you are carrying a load, keep the forks of the forklift low.**
 - If you stop to take a break, lower the forks fully.
- **Working at such close quarters, it's critical for you to maintain control of the equipment.**
 - Rain water, ice and snow that accumulate on a loading dock can cause a forklift or pallet truck to skid.
 - Hydraulic fluid, oil or grease will have a similar effect.
- **So pay close attention to the condition of the dock's surface.**
 - If you encounter skid hazards, make sure they are cleaned up immediately.
- **Most loading docks are about four feet above ground level.**
 - This vertical drop can create a serious falling hazard, both for materials handling equipment and its operators.
 - To prevent problems, safe work practices need to be followed.
- **Before driving across dockplates, dock boards or dock levelers, you should check that they...**
 - Are rated to support the combined weight of the equipment and the load.
 - Are properly positioned, with at least 8 inches of overlap on the vehicle and the dock.
 - Are not sloped at an unsafe angle.
 - And are secure.
- **Before you drive onto a truck or trailer, check that it is strong enough to support the weight of your equipment and its load.**
 - To do that you'll need to check the vehicle's floor for damage or other weakness.
- **This is also a good time to make sure there's enough light inside the vehicle for you to see clearly.**
 - If necessary, arrange for additional lighting to be installed.

- **At this point you can proceed with the process of loading and unloading.**
 - Drive straight across bridge plates, dockplates and levelers at right angles.
 - Remember to beep your horn when you enter and exit the vehicle.

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- **Loading docks require people and materials handling equipment to work together at close quarters, so you need to stay alert.**
- **Docks' elevated platforms can create serious fall hazards for both people and equipment.**
- **Keep dock surfaces clean and wear appropriate safety shoes to avoid slips, trips and falls.**
- **Trucks and tractor-trailers should always be shut down and secured when they are parked at a dock.**
- **Equipment drivers should be especially cautious when operating on a loading dock and in the vehicles that are parked there.**
- **Now that you understand the hazards associated with working on loading docks, and the safe work practices you can use to avoid them, you can help to make sure that you and your coworkers go home safe and injury-free at the end of every day!**