

WAREHOUSE SAFETY

COURSE OUTLINE

- **The fast-paced work of a warehouse can make it easy to forget the importance of safety.**
 - You might be tempted to skip some precautions for the sake of productivity.
 - But that kind of thinking can lead to devastating results.
- **So always stop and think before you begin a task. Ask yourself...**
 - “What are the hazards around me?”
 - “How can I protect myself and my coworkers?”
- **One thing to consider is the kind of personal protective equipment (PPE) you should use.**
- **PPE is anything you can wear to prevent or minimize injury, such as...**
 - Gloves.
 - A hard hat or safety helmet.
 - Safety glasses.
 - Steel-toed boots.
 - Ear protection.
 - High-visibility clothing.
 - Dust mask.
- **But PPE can't protect you if it's sitting on the shelf, so be sure to put it on.**
 - Check to make sure that it's in good condition.
 - If it fails inspection, take it out of service.
- **There may be times when you and your coworkers will need to meet a deadline or quota, and you need to really hustle to get the job done.**
 - But the faster you work, the more likely an accident is to occur.
- **So remember...**
 - Walk, don't run.
 - Watch where you're going.
 - Hand materials and tools to your coworkers. Never throw them.

- **On the other hand, when you have downtime, you might want to blow off some steam with your coworkers.**
 - But remember, you need to take safety seriously at all times.
 - Horseplay can get somebody seriously hurt.
- **Instead, when your workflow is “slow”, you can take the time to look at the space around you and pick up any clutter.**
 - Trash, debris and spills on the floor can cause slips, trips, and falls, interfere with safe operation of equipment.
 - It can even create a fire hazard.
- **Dispose of trash immediately in the proper containers.**
 - If you discover a liquid spill, clean it up or report it right away.
 - Otherwise, someone could slip on it.
 - And always report any loose flooring or other conditions that could cause trouble.
- **But that's only part of good housekeeping.**
 - It also involves not creating unsafe situations.
 - Don't park a load or leave pallets where people don't expect them... even "temporarily".
 - That's an accident just waiting to happen.
- **You need to use extra caution when you're working with a hazardous material.**
 - Make sure you take the time to learn about what the material is and what its hazards are.
 - You should also learn how you can protect yourself, when working with it.
- **Your employer will provide you with information and training on safe handling and storage of these substances in your Hazard Communication sessions, including...**
 - What PPE you should use when you are handling a hazardous material.
 - What to do in case of a HAZMAT spill.
 - What first aid treatment to give someone if they're exposed to a hazardous material.
- **You can also find this information in a material's Safety Data Sheet (SDS).**
 - This should be stored in a central location at your warehouse.

- **“Materials handling” is what most warehouse work is all about.**
 - But if you don’t know how to do it safely, you can seriously injure yourself and the people around you.
 - So how do you keep up productivity while still avoiding accidents?
- **You can make any “materials handling” task safer when you take time to prepare.**
 - First, look at the load and decide what’s the best method to move it.
 - If it's on a pallet, use a pallet jack, a pallet truck or get someone with a forklift to help you.
- **For smaller items, a dolly or hand truck might be the best approach.**
 - And if it's just one reasonably lightweight item, you could lift and carry it yourself.
- **Once you know how you’re going to move the item, you have to plan the route you'll follow to get your load to its destination.**
 - The goal is to get there quickly and safely.
- **You should avoid overly congested areas and look for any obstacles that could cause you to trip.**
 - If you do come across any, remove them... or find an alternate route.
 - Remember to make sure there's a clear, open place to put the load once you get where you're going!
- **When a load is too heavy for you to lift on your own, you rely on equipment to help you move it safely.**
 - But you should always do an inspection before you use it.
- **Check the mechanical condition, and make sure it's rated to handle the required weight of your load.**
 - "Overloading" can be very dangerous.
- **How you load the equipment is important, too.**
 - Loosely stacked or unbalanced loads can slip off and wreak havoc.
- **So load with stability in mind. To keep the center of gravity low...**
 - Place heavier and larger items near the bottom.
 - Place lighter and smaller ones near the top.
 - Keep stacks at a safe height.

- **If you do have to stack any unbalanced or awkwardly shaped items, make sure to secure them before moving out.**
 - Strapping or stretch wrap can be useful here.
- **Equipment like forklifts, pallet jacks and dollies can help with many materials handling activities.**
 - But a lot of lifting and carrying gets done in a warehouse as well.
 - Many workers suffer back pain and other injuries as a result.
 - But this doesn't have to happen... especially if you think before you lift.
- **Start by asking...**
 - Is the load too heavy to lift easily by myself?
 - Is it too bulky for me to see where I'm going after I lift it?
 - Is it too awkward or unbalanced for me to carry safely alone?
- **If you answer “yes” to any of these questions, don't lift the load alone.**
 - Ask a coworker to give you a hand.
- **When you do decide to lift something by yourself, you need to do it safely.**
 - Keep your back straight (never bend at the waist).
 - Get close to the object and lower yourself by bending your knees.
 - Grip the object firmly, tight to your body.
 - Then lift using your legs.
- **But "lifting" is only part of the job.**
 - Once you've picked something up you have to get it to where it needs to go.
- **Carrying a load safely means watching where you're going and stepping carefully... while still keeping your back straight.**
 - Don't twist your body when you need to make a turn.
 - Change direction by moving your feet.
- **When it's time to "unload", there are a few more things to keep in mind.**
 - Keep the load close to your body and your back straight.
 - Squat down using your knees and hips.
 - Engage your core as you lower yourself.
 - Never rush!

- **Moving, storing and stacking materials can be a grueling task.**
 - That's where pallets come in.
 - They simplify the process by consolidating loads to make them easier to store and transport.
- **But they do have some hazards of their own, so you need to know how to work with them safely.**
- **OSHA addresses pallet stacking safety in one of its standards about handling materials.**
 - It states that, *"Storage of material shall not create a hazard," and "... bags, containers, bundles, etc., stored in tiers shall be stacked, blocked, interlocked, and limited in height so that they are stable and secure against sliding or collapse"*.
- **To keep yourself safe when you're handling them, remember that pallets can often have sharp edges, splinters or protruding nails.**
 - So you should always inspect them closely.
 - PPE can really come in "handy" here, so you should wear sturdy gloves whenever you're handling pallets.
- **If you find a damaged pallet, scrap it.**
 - Its condition will only get worse over time and become more hazardous for everyone.
- **Getting on a pallet is dangerous.**
 - They can easily shift as you move across them.
 - If your foot slips through a gap in the boards you can end up with a twist, a sprain or even a break.
- **So never stand or walk on a pallet.**
 - Instead, use proper platforms or steps to reach high areas in the warehouse.
- **Empty pallets can be heavier than they look, and they are awkward to lift.**
 - So when you can, get help from a coworker when handling them.
- **Always stack empty pallets flat, and never more than about four feet high.**
 - That way they're easier to access, and the stack is less likely to tip over.

- **When you're setting pallets down, never lay them on their sides.**
 - They could easily fall over and hurt something or somebody.
- **Materials that have been stacked on a pallet can be much more convenient to store than non-palletized loads.**
 - But remember, doing it safely means not creating any new hazards in the process.
- **Begin by checking whether the materials require a special environment, such as a very dry, dark or well-ventilated area.**
- **Determine if storing them with any other materials could create a dangerous condition.**
 - This is particularly important with chemicals and other HAZMATs.
 - (You can find this information in the “safe storage” section of a material's Safety Data Sheet... or you can ask your supervisor.)
- **How you stack materials is crucial to warehouse safety.**
 - With the quantities and weights that can be involved, they can be lethal if they collapse or tip over.
- **You can help prevent this by...**
 - Stacking all materials on a flat base.
 - Placing the larger and heavier objects close to the floor, and lighter objects higher up.
 - Stacking boxes and loaded pallets straight and evenly.
- **Don't stack items so high that they touch overhead lights or pipes.**
 - And remember, you must have at least 18 inches of clearance between stacked materials and sprinkler heads.
- **You also need to consider where you're putting your materials.**
 - Never store or stack them in front of exits or safety equipment.
 - You shouldn't obstruct aisles, passageways or evacuation routes, either.
- **There are times that you'll want to break up materials that have been palletized.**
 - You need to be careful as you do this, especially if they have been “strapped” to the pallet.
 - Straps can be very tight and can spring out at you when you cut them.

- **Watch out for materials that haven't been stacked well, too.**
 - They could fall apart when you are moving the pallet or when strapping or stretch-wrap is removed.
- **Forklifts are the "workhorses" of warehouses.**
 - They're specifically designed to handle large quantities of materials quickly and efficiently.
 - But they can also pose significant hazards to employees who may be working nearby.
- **You might think that it is the forklift operator's responsibility to keep you safe.**
 - But you have to work with them to prevent accidents, too.
 - So you should always be aware of your surroundings and never assume that forklift operators will see you.
- **Forklift operators are trained professionals.**
 - They know their equipment and how to use it safely.
 - And they know the "rules of the road".
- **But the noise of a forklift itself can often prevent drivers from hearing you.**
 - Sometimes the load that they're carrying can obscure their vision.
- **So it's up to you to make sure a forklift operator knows you're there.**
 - To stay out of their way, you should use designated pedestrian walkways whenever possible.
 - Keep to the right when walking in aisles.
 - You don't want to "pop up" where a driver doesn't expect you.
- **The better your facility's "warehouse traffic management" is, the safer you will be.**
- **So whenever possible, your employer should establish...**
 - Marked pathways and "safe zones" for pedestrians.
 - Visual cues and communication tools to guide both pedestrians and forklift operators.
 - A traffic flow layout that avoids congestion and "bottlenecks".
 - But remember, it is your responsibility to use these tools.

- **You also need to remember that you can't predict the actions of your coworkers.**
 - So as you move around your warehouse stop, look, and listen for forklifts, especially near blind corners and intersections.
 - These can be trouble spots in a warehouse just like they are on city streets.
- **Forklift operators should honk their horns at these locations.**
 - You can add an extra margin of safety by being alert and cautious as you approach these areas.
 - If your workplace has installed convex mirrors to help you see around corners, use them.
- **Forklifts can move strangely, too.**
 - They steer with their rear wheels so they can maneuver better in tight places.
- **This means they can turn very sharply, and that their back end swings out when they do.**
 - If you are near a forklift, don't let this catch you by surprise.
- **Some other things to keep in mind when you're working around forklifts include...**
 - Always stay away from their forks.
 - Never get between a forklift and a wall.
 - Never work, stand or walk under a raised load.
- **Finally, remember that forklifts are for moving materials, not people.**
 - No one but the operator should ever ride on a forklift.
- **Loading docks are one of the most important areas in a warehouse.**
 - They can also be one of the most dangerous.
 - In fact, about 25% of all warehouse accidents happen on loading docks.
- **Rain or shine, there are always materials to be loaded or unloaded.**
 - When there are poor weather conditions, you have to be extra careful.
- **Rain, snow and ice increase the risk of slips and falls on a dock.**
 - So in these types of conditions, you need to watch your footing.

- **You always want to...**
 - Keep the dock surface as dry as possible.
 - Not let snow or ice accumulate on the floor.
 - Wear boots with good traction.
 - Use dock shelters and seals if they are available.
- **Working in high-heat conditions can be dangerous, too. So when it's hot be sure to...**
 - Use dock shelters and seals to avoid being in direct sunlight for too long.
 - Use fans if they are available.
 - Stay hydrated.
- **Staying clear of forklifts can be hard when you're working on a loading dock.**
 - Being in such a crowded area can require you to work at close quarters with them.
 - So you need to be extra vigilant when they are around.
- **Crowding can also force you closer to unguarded edges of the dock.**
 - This is especially risky when there's no truck backed in.
- **It can be a long way down.**
 - Which is also why jumping on or off of a loading dock is a bad idea.
 - Use the stairs or a ladder.
- **"Dock plates" can bridge the gap between the loading dock and a truck or trailer.**
 - But they need to be used properly to be effective.
- **A dock plate must be rated to support the total weight of the load you're handling.**
 - That includes any equipment that's moving it.
 - Also, to be secure dock plates must be positioned with at least 8 inches of dock overlap on both ends.
- **When the time comes to unload a truck or trailer, there are other hazards you need to be aware of.**
 - For instance, the load inside may have shifted during transit.
- **That means materials could come tumbling out at you when you open the doors.**
 - So avoid possible falling objects by standing clear.

- **Other times, loading or unloading can cause a truck or trailer to gradually roll away from the loading dock.**
 - This is called "trailer creep".
 - It can be deadly if people and equipment fall into the resulting gap.
- **To prevent it from moving, any truck parked at the dock should...**
 - Have its engine turned off.
 - Its transmission in reverse.
 - Its parking brake applied.
- **You can verify all of this with the driver of the truck when they arrive.**
- **To be doubly safe, you should chock the wheels as well.**
 - But keep an eye on them.
 - Sometimes they can come loose while you're working.
- **Some loading docks have mechanical trailer-restraint devices that lock onto a truck's axle or frame.**
 - If your facility has these, be sure to use them.

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- **You should always wear the proper PPE in a warehouse... including gloves, boots and safety glasses.**
- **Never engage in horseplay in a warehouse... and even if you're in a rush, remember to walk and not run.**
- **When you're lifting or moving materials, you should always determine if you'll need any equipment to assist you, plan your route, and remember to use safe lifting techniques.**
- **Use caution when you're stacking or storing pallets. Never stack them too high, and make sure they are stable and undamaged.**
- **Avoid getting in the path of a forklift, and make your presence known to any forklift operator who is in the area.**
- **And be sure to keep loading docks dry and free of snow and ice. Use wheel chocks or restraining tools to avoid "trailer creep".**
- **Now that you know the hazards you can face in a warehouse and how to navigate them, you can help keep yourself, your coworkers and your facility safe... everyday!**