

Racking Errors Can Rain Disaster on Workers

WHAT'S AT STAKE

Most people don't pay a lot of attention to racking systems until something goes wrong with one and thousands of pounds of supplies or products come crashing down onto workers below.

Even if workers escape injury, a major rack failure and the spillage of materials or goods can put a workplace out of commission for days.

WHAT'S THE DANGER

There are several causes of racking system incidents, but one of the most common ones involves a forklift striking shelving. When this happens, materials on the rack may dislodge and fall from heights, or the rack itself may become weakened and fail at that point or sometime in the future.

Other causes of racking incidents include materials falling through the rear of a rack or vibration in the workplace resulting in unsecured materials shaking loose from shelves.

Racks may also be prone to failure if they are poorly designed, improperly installed or assembled, overloaded, incorrectly used or are not regularly inspected and maintained.

EXAMPLE

A 25-year-old man working in a cooler at beverage distribution center was killed after a storage rack holding beer kegs, each weighing up to 160 pounds or 72 kilograms, collapsed onto him. The man was pronounced dead at the scene from head injuries.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

If you work with racking systems and pallets, it's important to pay attention to their load ratings and to never exceed those limits. Otherwise, components may become deformed and weakened and may fail at some point, with potentially serious consequences for anyone in the area.

Here are some additional racking safety tips:

- Any load that could potentially break apart and fall must be properly secured to a pallet and its weight should be uniformly distributed on the pallet.
- Pallets that become damaged should not be used. This includes pallets that have protruding nails or damaged or missing boards.
- Loads should not overhang the edge of a pallet by more than two inches.
- Safety netting should be used to prevent pallets from falling off the back of a rack. This is especially important in areas where pedestrian pathways run behind racking.
- If you spot any potential safety hazards on racking, such as paint scratches, dents, bowed or missing components, broken welds or pallets that do not appear to be placed safely, inform your supervisor.
- Never climb pallet racking.
- If lighting around racking is insufficient, talk to your supervisor.
- When aisles between racks are too narrow for lift trucks to properly maneuver between them, it can be difficult to avoid forklift contact with racking. If you are involved in this kind of incident, or if you witness one, report it to your supervisor right away so that the racking can be inspected properly.

FINAL WORD

Racking systems are so common that they often blend into the scenery of the average workplace. However, the safety of all workers depends on spotting and reporting damage or overloading of racking components. ■

Meeting material to go: *Safety meeting materials such as presentation tips, audio track, PowerPoint presentations, quiz answers and more are downloadable at www.SafeSupervisor.com*

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. Racking components can withstand significant impacts from forklifts without sustaining critical damage that could injure or kill workers.
 True False
2. If you spot damage on a rack, such as dents or buckled components, you should _____.
3. Loads should not overhang the edge of a pallet by more than:
a. Two feet
b. Four feet
c. Six inches
d. Two inches
4. When working with racking systems and pallets, it's important to never exceed their _____.
5. Name two things that must be done if you're loading onto a pallet a load that could potentially break apart and fall.

What Would You Do?

You recently witnessed a forklift operator back a lift truck into a storage rack, causing a support bracket to bend. You don't want to get anyone in trouble, but you are concerned that the rack may no longer be safe. How would you handle this situation?
