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# Friday Safety Brief

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### DOCK SAFETY

How many “near misses” or actual incidents have you experienced involving Forklifts, Powered Industrial Trucks, “Hi-Lo’s” or however you define those freight moving machines speeding around your dock, going in and out of trailers. These incidents can include trailers being pulled away from the dock when forklifts are entering or exiting the trailer, operators driving off the dock when no trailer is backed into the door, failure of the dock plate to properly support the industrial truck, and the loading or unloading unit rolling away from the loading door. These incidents occur far too often with Safety Managers scratching their heads wondering how they happen and ways to prevent recurrences.

Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) General Industry Regulations 29CFR 1910 Subpart N “Materials Handling and Storage” paragraph 1910.178 Powered Industrial Trucks, outlines the regulations required for the safe operation of forklifts and means to keep operators safe. It may be



wise to go on [www.osha.gov](http://www.osha.gov) to review this Standard. Let’s face it a loading/unloading dock is fast and furious with forklift operators, dock men, switchers and drivers all playing in a symphony conducted by the Dock Supervisor. When a sour note is made, that symphony turns sour, especially when that sour note is an industrial truck falling off the rear of a trailer. How can this happen? When a powered lift truck falls off the rear of a trailer it can be attributed to: a) the loading/unloading vehicle being pulled away prematurely; b) faulty dock boards or plates; c) the loading/unloading vehicle is not chocked with movement secured and d) driver inattention.

When the loading/unloading unit is pulled away prematurely, the root cause is lack of communication between the different sections of that symphony. A safety plan needs to be developed which focuses on establishing lines of communication, conveying to the professional driver, the trailer can safely be pulled away from the dock. This plan must be posted and reviewed by all individuals involved with loading, unloading and moving the trailer from the dock door. The plan can be as extensive and costly as you want but must address those lines of communication, be understood and complied with. Some warehouses install locking devices, latching onto ICC bumpers, thus preventing trailers from being removed until released by an authorized individual. Other companies having dock bumpers or shrouded overhead doors install “traffic lights” at each door showing red when the trailer is being loaded/unloaded then green when the trailer is clear to be moved.

Some dock operations use the simple method of closing the overhead door and/or trailer door which indicates to the driver it’s clear to kick the trailer out. However, the driver must still get out and look behind his unit before moving forward. Depending on the system one chooses, the one common denominator they all share is communication to all players conveying to them when it’s safe to move the trailer. With regard to faulty dock boards, OSHA Standard 1910.30 (a) (1) covers portable, permanently installed and powered dock boards being strong enough and well secured in position. The facility manager must inspect dock boards regularly removing those from service that are cracked and broken; getting them repaired ASAP. Too many dock plates become warped, bent and weakened from constant use and must be made part of a scheduled preventive maintenance program. What about the dreaded “roll-a-way” when the forklift enters or exits the trailer pushing it away from the dock plate? OSHA covers this incident under 1910.178(k)(1) which specifically states “The brakes of highway trucks shall be set and wheel chocks placed under the rear wheels to prevent trucks from rolling while they are boarded with powered industrial trucks. Also,” 1910.178(k) (3) states “Fixed jacks may be necessary to support a semitrailer and prevent upending during loading the loading and unloading when the trailer is not coupled to a tractor.” It is an OSHA requirement that chocks be provided to secure the movement of the trailer. This can be an issue in those the colder climates where snow falls with snow plows pushing those chocks to the nether regions. It was always commented in New England that the sure sign of spring is when chock blocks “sprout” from the melting snow banks. Whether the warehouse provides the chocks or requires the truck driver to bring his/her own; it must be documented in the plan and understood by everyone. Probably the most critical incident to overcome is driver inattention. The Department of Transportation has an all-out blitz regarding distracted driver behavior to re-focus the driver’s attention to safely operate the Commercial Motor Vehicle. The Terminal Manager must use a similar tactic to ensure all employees understand his/her expectations and hold everyone accountable to those expectations. Only then will greater awareness be achieved on dock safety. Every incident or “near miss” must be addressed, documented and, if required, initiate progressive discipline and provide retraining. This is the way to prevent forklift mishaps from occurring. Dock safety must become a “Culture”, believed in and accepted by all employees. It cannot be tossed aside when Service or Fleet Cuts require expedited loading or unloading. Everyone from Management, Supervisory, Dockworker, Yardman and Driver must be involved in this culture. Sure, having OSHA pay you a visit is painful however, what can be worse than a valued employee getting killed for someone not complying with your rules and procedures? No OSHA fine will ever replace that employee.

