

THE COMPLETE WAREHOUSE WORKER SAFETY CHECKLIST:

Action Steps to Ensure a Safe Workplace

Warehouse workers have one of the top 100 deadliest jobs in the United States. With potential safety hazards lurking around every corner, creating a safe work environment is a monumental task, but safety must be a top priority among executive leadership and management. A safe workplace boosts employee morale, reduces the cost of lost productivity, missed workdays, and worker's compensation costs, while contributing to the overall efficiency of your warehouse operation.

Below, you'll find a checklist with action steps related to various aspects of warehouse operations, encompassing everything from the fundamentals to developing effective safety policies, ensuring equipment safety, and everything you need to know to cultivate a safe and productive working environment.

Developing Safety Policies and Procedures: Action Steps

- **Recognize the most common causes of warehouse injuries.** Awareness of the risks is the first step in implementing appropriate safety policies and procedures.
- **Incorporate safety training into your onboarding process.** All warehouse workers should be armed with knowledge of the company's safety policies and understand industry standards and regulations. Be sure that new hires know the location of all safety equipment, emergency exits, first aid information, and other safety resources. New hires should also be trained on emergency response plans.
- **Educate workers on ergonomics.** Teach all employees proper lifting procedures, as well as the proper ergonomic movements for bending, stretching, reaching, and hauling materials. Workers who use the proper movements are less likely to suffer overexertion or repetitive stress injuries.
- **Ensure that complete written safety policies and procedures are available to all workers.** Warehouse workers should have easy access to complete policies and procedures in writing for easy reference.
- **Consider the proper procedures when determining the amount of time needed to complete tasks.** The time needed to follow the proper safety procedures should be factored into any determinations of the time requirements for a worker to perform a given task. Otherwise, you risk encouraging workers to skip important safety steps in order to complete tasks faster.
- **Provide adequate rest breaks for workers engaging in physically demanding tasks.** Fatigue results in a greater risk of injury, as well as a reduction in the quality of work.



- **Establish a Safety Committee.** Your Safety Committee should include representatives from all roles and departments. Safety Committees should foster open lines of communication and empower workers to report potential hazards or unsafe conditions.
- **Develop an Accident Prevention Plan and incentivize workers to take part in cultivating a safe workplace.** Set minimum safety standards and post clearly visible safety instructions in the vicinity of all equipment. Incentivize warehouse floor workers, office staff, and management to reduce and eliminate potential workplace hazards. Recognize and reward safe behaviors, as well as workers who recognize a potential safety risk and bring it to management's attention.

Basic Housekeeping: Action Steps

- **Evaluate floor surfaces.** Floor surfaces should be non-slippery, as well as free from dings or dents. Additionally, the floor should be free of wires and cords.
- **Evaluate the condition of storage racks, walls, ceilings, and other surfaces.** Storage racks should be in good condition with no cracks, missing pieces or distortions, or rust. Verify that the load limit for storage racks is not exceeded.
- **Identify loose or damaged flooring.** Damaged flooring or flooring that's coming loose from the substrate poses a risk of trips and falls. After identifying loose or damaged flooring, take action to have it repaired.
- **Ensure that sharp tools, such as box cutters, are properly stored.** Box cutters and other sharp tools should be safely stored when not in use.
- **Keep aisles clear and clutter-free.** Boxes and other items left in aisles can obstruct the flow of traffic and even block emergency exit paths.
- **Eliminate unsafe stacking.** Establish designated areas for storing pallets, boxes, and other containers. Identify any stacks of boxes or other objects on flat surfaces that are unsafe. Stacks should be no more than six feet high. Stacking methods should be consistent for items of like size and weight, without overburdening storage racks.
- **Ensure clear and unobstructed access to fire extinguishers and sprinklers.** In addition to obstructed emergency exits, boxes and other items can obstruct sprinklers and access to fire extinguishers. Verify that all safety and emergency equipment is unobstructed and easily accessible.
- **Verify that all spills are cleaned promptly and properly.** If your warehouse handles hazardous materials, following the recommended cleanup procedures avoids unnecessary health and safety risks.
- **Confirm that the required safety information and materials are in close proximity to battery charging stations.** Charging stations pose a number of safety risks. They must be properly ventilated and have an eye wash first aid station nearby. Both acid neutralization and spill control systems must be in place to meet safety standards.



Building and Infrastructure Safety: Action Steps

- **Block any areas, such as exposed or open loading dock doors, where workers could fall four feet or more.** These areas should be roped or chained off, or otherwise blocked to prevent access.
- **Provide adequate lighting in all areas of the building.** Poor lighting conditions hinders visibility and increases the risk of accidents and injury.
- **Verify that the warehouse is well-ventilated.** Even the dust and fumes from regular equipment operation and the day-to-day tasks carried out in a warehouse can pose health risks to workers if the building is poorly ventilated. Proper ventilation is critically important for warehouses that handle hazardous materials.
- **Confirm that safety rails are in place where necessary and are in good condition.**
- **Implement proper signage.** All exits should be clearly marked, and emergency exits should be easily visible from a distance. Areas within the warehouse without an exit in the line of sight should have signage with directions to the nearest exit. Using warehouse signage to mark the location of storage areas, shipping and receiving areas, loading and unloading, aisles, and other designated spaces can help to streamline the flow of traffic and reduce congestion in aisles that can increase the risk of accidents and injuries. Floor and rack storage limits should also be clearly posted.
- **Audit elevators, hoists, and other structural equipment.** Elevators and hoists should be inspected regularly, have safe and adequate clearances, and be free of obstructions, and have appropriate signals and directional warning signs. Inspection reports completed annually by a licensed inspector must be kept on file.
- **Confirm the presence and visibility of danger and hazard area signage.** Any dangerous or hazardous areas should be clearly marked with highly visible signage. These signs should identify the hazard present and convey the appropriate safety procedures to workers, such as "Warning: Batteries Being Charged," "Caution: Low Clearance," "Danger: Keep Clear at All Times," or "Notice: Hard Hats Required in This Area."
- **Verify that hazardous materials are properly labeled.** OSHA's Hazard Communication Standard sets forth requirements for the proper labeling of hazardous materials, including the use of pictograms that clearly convey the hazards posed by a chemical as well as the proper safety procedures for handling those materials.
- **Evaluate your warehouse layout for safety.** Most warehouses prioritize space utilization when designing a layout, but safety should also be a primary consideration. For instance, aisles should be wide enough to allow necessary equipment and personnel access.
- **Organize inventory with ergonomics in mind.** Containers and products that are moved most frequently by hand should be stored at ideal rack heights to minimize the amount of bending, stooping, and reaching necessary for workers to access these items.



Equipment and Material Safety: Action Steps

- **Verify proper certification of all equipment operators.** Certification is required to operate forklifts. Following an accident, additional training is required for operators. Additional training is also required if there's a change in the equipment used or the work setting, as well as if any unsafe operating practices are observed. Before permitting workers to operate equipment such as pallet jacks, reach trucks, walkie stackers, order pickers, and other equipment, provide proper training and test the worker's knowledge of safe operations.
- **Set guidelines on safe equipment operation.** Establish guidelines for safe operation, including speed limits for forklifts and other vehicles in designated areas of the building, as well as safe procedures for operating conveyors, shuttles, and other equipment.
- **Develop lockout/tagout procedures.** Lockout/tagout procedures are used to control hazardous energy during the servicing or maintenance of equipment or machinery. If lockout/tagout procedures are not followed, unexpected startup or a release of stored energy during maintenance procedures poses a risk of serious injury or death.
- **Implement routine equipment inspections.** Develop daily inspection procedures to engage your workers in inspecting equipment before use, such as checking for forklift seatbelts, verifying that aisles and other paths are free from obstructions, and verifying weight capacities and warning signal functionality before operating equipment. Provide separate safety checklists for operators to use prior to operating equipment to ensure safe operation. If equipment is deemed faulty in any way on inspection, it should be shut down immediately.
- **Implement regular audits of safety materials and equipment.** Conduct regular audits to verify that all safety materials and equipment is in the proper location and operating condition. For instance, confirm the location of and the last inspection date for all fire extinguishers. Are first aid stations properly stocked? Even safety materials such as hard hats should undergo regular safety inspections.
- **Don't forget to audit safety procedures.** Establishing safety procedures does little to ensure safety if warehouse workers are not following proper procedure. While auditing your safety materials and equipment, you should also evaluate workers' use of safety procedures related to the use of those materials. Are regular vehicle and equipment inspections being performed, and are all inspection procedures being followed? Are hard hats being worn in appropriate zones? Revise policies and procedures or re-train staff as necessary.