Take a Load Off Safely



What's at Stake

Loading and unloading cargo is a routine task at many workplaces. And it's a task that requires establishing and following safe procedures.

What's the Danger

If not secured tightly, materials may shift during transportation due to stresses, such as vibration and motion. As a result, materials can fall off the truck during the unloading operation, and strike or crush workers.

Example

A truck driver was unloading a delivery of a two-ton manufactured piece of steel. He was standing beside the truck, unfastening a securing strap when the piece of steel, which was improperly secured, fell off the truck and crushed him.

How to Protect Yourself

Everyone involved in the loading or unloading operation must:

- have a clear understanding of the procedures involved in the activity
- have site and freight-specific knowledge
- wear hardhats and highly visible reflective vests

How to Control Hazards When Loading

- Know your overall load weight and weight distribution.
- Do not exceed the trailer's weight rating, as overloaded trailers can result in loss of control of the trailer.
- Consider securing stacked or tiered materials either in single units or redundantly paired units, such as first and second tiers, second and third, third and fourth, etc. This may reduce the risk of load shifting and slippage during transport and unloading.
- Secure loads using load bars, vertical supports and load straps to reduce the risk of materials shifting during transport.

How to Control Hazards When Unloading

Examine the load.

Incoming freight must be inspected by the forklift operator and driver, or a

designated competent person. This inspection would determine:

- Are the load stakes properly positioned?
- Has the load shifted?
- Have bundles twisted?
- Is it safe to loosen cargo straps?

Examine the vehicle.

- Is the trailer level? It’s best to avoid unloading on a steep grade.
- Is the parking brake on?
- Are the wheels blocked or chocked? This is especially important if unloading is taking place near a slope.

Check the area.

- Check for overhead power lines.
- Ensure that no ground personnel are downhill of any load being moved.
- Workers on foot should never be on the opposite side of a truck from a forklift while it is loading or unloading material.

Prepare to unload.

- Remove all load covers completely?from the ground. Do not climb the load to remove a tarp or other covers.
- Loosen the cargo straps from the loading/unloading side and remove them completely before unloading.
- Before unloading, secure materials that may shift, such as pipes.

Final Word

Loading and unloading materials, goods and products are common tasks performed at operations every day. They’re also common tasks that result in many fatalities and injuries. Help prevent injuries at your workplace. Learn how to identify hazards associated with loading and unloading, and follow safe procedures.