

THE TOOLBOX

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a loss control resource for members

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Merchandise Stacking and Stacking Safety

Safe procedures for product placement in a retail location



It is in the nature of retail hardware and lumber operations to stock merchandise and stack it so it is easily accessible and readily available for sale. Each year, there are reported injuries to both customers and employees alike, due to falling merchandise. Typically, these preventable accidents happen when products are being stacked or unstacked.

Storeowners must take all reasonable steps to ensure their operations are kept free from products, substances and equipment that pose an obvious threat of danger and injury. By providing an environment that is free from excessive liability is not only a smart business practice, but also contributes to a positive store morale.

Falling merchandise typically involves one or more of the following characteristics:



High Stacking – In many hardware and lumber operations additional inventory is stacked on shelves above the sales floor to maximize space. Displays often are stacked too high increasing the number of products that are at risk of falling.

Unsecured Merchandise – Not all stores use physical restraints to secure overhead stock. Safety devices such as security

bars, safety ties, fencing and shelf extenders can greatly reduce the possibility of product falling to the sales floor and people below.

Improper Training – Often employees are not adequately trained, if at all, on proper stocking techniques. Many incidents can be prevented if employees are trained how to safely stack products, recognize existing stocking hazards and how to correct them.

No Warning of Danger – Often customers are not aware of the risk of falling merchandise as they are shopping. Using a spotter when products are being stacked is a very effective way to protect customers. An additional way to limit injuries to customers is to place warning signage, either permanent or temporary, and cord off areas being stocked. Restrict stocking to times when the store is not open to the public or when store traffic is minimal can also be effective.

Outside Events – Falling merchandise can be triggered by many external factors such as: being stacked in an unstable manner, stacking different size and shape products on top of each other, stacking heavy merchandise on top of lighter weight merchandise and using a “push through” technique. This technique is used when moving merchandise against other merchandise to make the end product fall. If merchandise is too large for the shelf or is hanging off the edge of the shelf, it can fall to the ground due to vibrations from inside or outside of the location.



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Merchandise Stocking Safety Tips



Stores often stock long, narrow merchandise such as lumber, pipes and long handled tools vertically to maximize space. This type of display can be very effective, but if not properly secured, merchandise can fall damaging the product or injuring someone. A successful way to secure vertical merchandise in a display, but not hinder a customer's ability to retrieve the product for purchase, is to have a support tether stretched across the top third of the display keeping the products from falling forward. Additionally, installing a kick-board at the base of the display further reduces the opportunity for product for slide out onto the sales floor creating a trip hazard. By adding these two simple and inexpensive items, you can all but eliminate a potentially large claim.

Safety Tips



Employees and customers reaching for products are a regular occurrence and common risk to injury. Movement beyond a person's regular rotation and reach can open them up to strain injuries. Adding the weight of lifting an item can increase the amount of damage to the body.

Product is typically removed from the front of a pallet or display first. This leaves the remaining product in the back of the display, where customers must reach to access and lift the product. Aside from muscle strain, customers and less than diligent employees, may climb on the display risking a fall along with destruction of the display and additional product leaving you, the owner, open to an injury claim and lost product income.

Low Product Locations

The main hazard with products located on shelves or pallets low to the ground is back strain related to lifting injuries. People are forced to lift from ground height putting their backs at risk, since most people are not in the habit of using safe lifting techniques, such as lifting with their legs rather than their lower backs.

High Product Locations

Products located above shoulder level leave customers and employees open to injuries to the back and shoulders from awkward lifting. Additionally, head injuries are a possibility should merchandise fall from above.

Possible Solutions

- Zone shelved merchandise, keeping products pulled to the front of the shelf to increase customers' ability to reach the product without excessive reaching.
- Create safety zones where customers cannot enter while forklifts are in use.
- Develop a process to rotate pallets on the sales floor to keep the product stacks toward the front and to maintain accessibility. This may involve using a forklift or pallet truck to pull the pallet out of the slot, turn it 180 degrees and replace it into the slot or using pallet turntables.
- Provide employees with "Pick Sticks", sometimes called "Bow Peep" hooks to pull small, lightweight product closer to the edge of shelving making it reachable.
- Provide easily accessible ladders for employee use to ensure they have the tools to correctly stock shelves as well as safely help customers retrieve merchandise. Be sure employees are using the correct type of ladder for the job at hand. Also, frequently inspect ladder condition. Ladders should be for employees use only.
- Train employees to be proactive in offering to help customers reach or lift merchandise using correct equipment instead of allowing customers to climb on shelves and displays or attempt to lift something that is too heavy for them.
- Place the faster moving products at levels around waist-height. This is the most desirable location for customers to retrieve the product as well as employees to restock merchandise.
- Provide wider slots and aisles for products that are excessively heavy to give room for multiple employees a team-lifting technique or for lifting equipment such as a forklift or pallet jack.

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