

Warehouse Safety And Employee Satisfaction – What’s The Link?

In this article we'll look at the role which warehouse safety has to play in employee satisfaction, with a focus on the legislation which covers warehouse safety and the role which safety is likely to play in the recruitment and retention of warehouse employees. In addition we'll look at the steps which organisations can take to ensure that their warehouses are as safe as possible, including an increase in the use of automation.

Legislation

Given the varied nature of the safety risks present in the average warehouse environment, it probably comes as no surprise to discover that the health and safety legislation relating to warehouses is covered by a range of different regulations. Depending upon the specific operational procedures within a warehouse or indeed the actual goods stored and handled on a regular basis, the regulations which apply will differ, but will be covered by one or more of the following:

The Health and Safety Act

The [Health and Safety Act at Work 1974](#) is the overarching legislation covering the responsibility of employers to take all reasonable practicable steps to look after their employees. The act itself is fairly complex, and for a clearer breakdown of the responsibilities of employers, you need to consult the [Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999](#). Amongst the requirements placed on employers are the following:

- Perform a comprehensive risk assessment of the warehouse and put in place measures designed to severely reduce or remove any risks which have been identified
- Provide employees with information on any risks which are present and provide any training needed to deal with those risks
- Liaise and consult on questions of health and safety with employees or their representative

In addition to the general responsibility for the health and safety of employees, anyone operating a warehouse will need to be cognisant of a range of regulations which apply specifically to the types of activities and environments likely to be present within an operative warehouse. These include the following:

The Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 (PUWER)

Under these regulations the employer has a responsibility to ensure that any work equipment in the warehouse is safe to use. This includes machinery, tools, installations and appliances that may pose a risk. The responsibilities set out in [PUWER](#) are as follows:

- Ensure that all equipment is maintained in safe working order, with a maintenance log kept
- Ensure that any employees using equipment are trained to do so

The Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations 1998 (LOLER)

These regulations are in place to ensure that lifting equipment such as winches, lifts and cranes, any of which might be utilised in a warehouse environment, are all used safely. The requirements of [LOLER](#) include the following:

- Lifting operations must be properly planned in advance and must be supervised by a 'competent person', which means a properly trained employee
- The lifting equipment used in a warehouse must be inspected regularly to ensure that it is safe to use, and records of the regular examinations need to be maintained

The Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992

These regulations are in place to ensure that any manual handling that takes place in a warehouse environment is done in a manner which protects the employees involved from injury. The requirements of the [Manual Handling Regulations](#) include the following:

- Ensure that the manual handling of hazardous waste is avoided wherever it is reasonably practicable to do so, using equipment such as goods lifts or cranes instead
- If manual handling can't be avoided, the risk should be assessed
- Measures should be put in place to minimise the risk of any manual handling carried out

The Work at Height Regulations 2005

The [Work at Height Regulations](#) cover the planning and practical delivery of any work at height. In almost every warehouse, employees will be working at height at some point – i.e. when picking stock or carrying out maintenance work – and when this happens the following regulations need to be followed:

- Wherever possible work at height should be avoided by taking steps such as using lifting equipment instead
- Where avoiding working at height is not possible all steps should be taken to minimise the risk to the employees
- Measures should be put in place to minimise the potential distance of any fall from height and thus the risks involved

The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 (COSHH)

These regulations – known as [COSHH](#) – set out rules on the handling and storage of substances which are hazardous to health. These substances are distinct from the regular waste products of a warehouse, and could include gases, fumes and chemicals. If the warehouse in question regularly stores the kind of substances covered by the regulations then you need to be aware of your responsibilities as employer. These include the following:

- Carry out a COSHH assessment to ascertain the risks presented by substances
- Work to find ways of preventing any exposure to hazardous substances at source

- If exposure can't be avoided altogether, the risks need to be controlled as much as is reasonably practicable

What to look out for

The technical details set out in the legislation detailed above are vital in terms of understanding exactly what your legal obligations to your warehouse employees are, but equally important in terms of creating a working environment which will help those employees to feel happy in their work is a firm understanding of that the practical risks of working in a warehouse are likely to be.

In simple terms, the main causes of accidents in a warehouse environment can be broken down into the following categories:

- Slips and trips
- Manual handling
- Working at height
- The movement of vehicles in and around the warehouse
- Objects moving or falling

Slips – employees slipping generally happens when the floor is contaminated or wet, and in the average warehouse the type of things likely to make a floor unsafe include oil, water, cleaning products, dry powders and foodstuffs. Waste products from handling goods such as plastic bags and wrapping can also cause slips. The first step to take to minimise the risk is to ensure that the floor, when clean, is level and dry, and also that the surface of the floor is not so smooth that even a small amount of liquid will make it extremely slippery. The second is to ensure that equipment is maintained well enough to minimise the risk of incidents such as leaks, and that the floor is always cleaned properly.

Trips – employees tripping is generally caused by objects on the warehouse floor or a poorly maintained floor surface. The floor surfaces inside and outside the warehouse should be checked to ensure that they are even. Workflows around the warehouse should be planned to avoid areas where goods, equipment or waste products are likely to cause obstructions, and any items which do fall onto routes which employees use should be noted through regular inspections and cleared as soon as possible.

Manual handling – the risk of injury from manual handling in the warehouse includes things such as neck pain and lower back pain. Wherever possible, manual handling tasks should be redesigned to make use of mechanical or automated devices such as conveyors, chutes, lifts, pallet trucks and trolleys. Employees should also be given training in safe manual handling techniques and the correct use of mechanical or automated devices.

Working at height – in addition to the steps outlined in the regulations pertaining to working at height, employers should take the time to ensure that all employees working at height have the ability to do so, offering training if it is needed. This is particularly relevant if specialist equipment such as a mobile elevating work platform (MEWP) is being used. Any

equipment used for working at height, such as ladders or stepladders, needs to be inspected on a regular basis and again before each time it is put to use.

Moving vehicle – the use of moving vehicles in a warehouse setting covers those vehicles delivering and collecting items from the warehouse, and the vehicles – such as fork lift trucks – moving around inside the warehouse. Deliveries need to be planned carefully in advance, with drivers given all relevant information ahead of time, including health and safety information. The possibility of visiting drivers having only a limited grasp of the English language should be factored into the information, through the use of pictograms to illustrate site rules.

Within the workplace, traffic routes which are used by pedestrian employees and vehicles should be designed to keep the two separate, either through designing distinct routes, or putting traffic control measures in place. In addition, traffic routes should be designed in a way which minimises the need to reverse, or contains reversing manoeuvres in an area not used by pedestrians. Routes should also avoid sharp bends and blind corners, as well as slopes which might impact on load stability.

Moving or falling objects – if there is an increased risk of objects falling in a particular part of the warehouse – i.e. where stock is regularly shifted to or from high shelving – then this area should be clearly marked with access limited to authorised employees. The use of handling equipment such as fork lift trucks needs to be dealt with carefully. The trucks themselves should be carefully maintained in line with the manufacturer's instructions. Specific attention needs to be paid to parts of the truck involved in lifting, such as the forks, tilt mechanism, chains and mast. Employers should instigate a documented check before each shift as well as a system for reporting defects and ensuring they are corrected, and a planned routine of regular maintenance. Employees operating the trucks need to undertake comprehensive training which includes basic training, specific job training and familiarisation training.

Further steps to avoid falling objects include the careful planning of storage areas. Areas of this kind should be officially designated and clearly marked, as well as being designed in a manner which avoids uneven surfaces, changes of gradient, tight corners and awkwardly placed doors and pillars. Pallets should be inspected before each use, and those which are damaged need to be repaired or disposed of.

The pallets used should also be the correct type for any pallet racking in the warehouse. The racking itself needs to be inspected and maintained regularly to ensure that it is safe. The inspection regime within a warehouse should include the following:

- The immediate reporting of any damage to the racking or defects which are spotted
- Visual inspections of the racking carried out on a regular basis
- Expert inspections carried out by trained employees at specific intervals

The need to work hard at ensuring the safety and well-being of employees in your warehouse is backed up by a range of statistics. According to a survey of the most dangerous jobs in the UK published in [Forbes magazine](#), for example, warehouse worker came in as the third most dangerous. Perhaps even more shocking than the high ranking is

the fact that the only jobs found to be more dangerous than working in a warehouse were fire-fighter and police officer. [Other statistics](#) relating to the danger of the warehouse working environment include the fact that, in 2021, fatal injuries in warehouses were up by 23% year on year, and that the part of a warehouse which offers the highest risk of accidents is the loading dock. Figures published by the Health and Safety Executive detailing work-related fatal injuries in 2023 stated that the most common accidents involved falls from a height, being struck by a moving/flying/falling object, and being hit by a moving vehicle, all of which are possibilities which need to be guarded against within any working warehouse environment.

All of this is important in and of itself, of course, but anyone operating a warehouse needs to be aware of the degree to which poor levels of safety and well-being – or even a perception of the same – can impact on issues such as employee retention. There's no escaping the degree to which employee retention has become an issue across the industry as a whole. According to figures from the ONS, the [demand for warehouse staff](#) had risen by 43.2% by the end of 2022 when compared to demand before the COVID-19 pandemic. Another survey in 2022, this one carried out by the [Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport](#) (CILT), found that 86% of the companies surveyed had dealt with shortages in warehouse operatives in the two years prior.

The answers to recruiting and retaining warehouse staff will involve the obvious steps such as increasing pay and opportunities for in-work advancement, as well as taking the kind of basic safety steps already outlined in this article. Over and above this, however, it seems clear that working on warehouse design which can incorporate the latest technology will play a huge role in persuading warehouse workers to feel valued and safe at work. We've [written previously](#) about the drive for greater automation across the warehouse industry, and how racking system design can help enable existing spaces to tap into that drive. Recent research into the attitudes of warehouse workers backs up the feeling that the introduction of technology will help to boost job satisfaction. According to [the survey](#), carried out by Zebra Technologies Corporation and Indeed, 62% of respondents stated that their employers are investing in technology to help them to do their jobs, with 55% saying this is making their working life easier and 44% reporting increased job satisfaction. More than half of the respondents – at 58% - see their warehouse jobs as being long term.