

Hazards While Loading and Unloading Truck Trailers

Drivers can potentially be injured while loading, strapping/securing, and tarping loads. They then have the same injury potential when they reach their destination and unload their trucks. Proper loading and unloading procedures should be established by employers. All workers in the loading and unloading zones should be trained on these safe work practices. Drivers must also be trained to determine the proper number and type of tie downs needed to secure the cargo.

Loading and Unloading Safety

- Establish and know where the danger zone is. This zone can vary with each load. It may be as much as 40 - 50 feet around the truck or as small as 5 - 10 feet in a concentrated space. Factors that need to be considered are sizes of cargo being loaded or unloaded, the method used to load or unload (i.e. crane, forklift, etc.), movement of cargo, what can go wrong, and where people need to be if something does go wrong.
- Never turn your back on the loading or unloading process while in the danger zone. Always know your escape route. Be aware of others in the zone even if you are not responsible for them. Sometimes the closest emergency safe zone may be under the trailer.
- All loads must be secured to the truck, container, or trailer to prevent shifting of material and equipment during transport. Equipment such as load bars, vertical supports, and load straps should be used to ensure that the load arrives in the same orientation as when it departed.
- Each load is different. Look for potential problems with your load. (Is it tall, narrow, double stacked, or loose?) Develop a plan to safely release each type of load.
- Material and equipment can shift or break free during any location transfer. Workers on foot should never be on the opposite side of a truck from a forklift while it is loading or unloading material.
- If at all possible, secure the load from the ground. Climbing on trailers and/or cargo is a leading cause for slips, trips, and falls. If you must climb on the trailer, you should use the three-point system of ascent and descent at all times.
- Use only undamaged straps or chains. Damaged units can cause injury when they break.
- If the strap gets caught on the load, pulling on it can cause the strap buckle to strike you with force when it comes loose.
- Articles of cargo that are likely to roll must be restrained by chocks, wedges, a cradle, or other equivalent means to prevent rolling.
- When tarping, carry a ladder to access the top of the load, and use tarping stations and forklifts to get tarps to the top of the load. Make sure to roll tarps forward and not backwards.
- While engaged in loading and unloading operations, the use of cell phones and any other mobile devices should be prohibited. These devices can distract employees in the danger zone, putting everyone at risk.

IMPORTANT NOTICE - The information and suggestions presented by Western National Insurance Company in this Technical Bulletin are for your consideration in your loss prevention efforts. They are not intended to be complete or definitive in identifying all hazards associated with your business, preventing workplace accidents, or complying with any safety related, or other, laws or regulations. You are encouraged to alter them to fit the specific hazards of your business and to have your legal counsel review all of your plans and company policies.