

Spot The Safety Violation: Don't Stand Too Close



How safe would you feel standing or walking next to this stack of products'



It's true that improperly handling or moving materials can endanger workers and expose them to the risk of serious injury. However, it's important to remember that improperly *storing* materials can be every bit as hazardous.

This picture shows stacks of some kind of bagged product 'dog food' soil in a store. Although the stack is very neat, not much was done to ensure it was safe and secure.

Yes, whoever stacked the bags did alternate the direction of the rows, which provides some stability for the giant pile. But there should also be braces, straps or some other means of keeping the pile from collapsing or bags from falling from it.

In addition, this pile is so high that it clearly is a danger to anyone in the vicinity. Should a store employee or shopper bump into the stack or jostle it while removing a bag, the whole thing could collapse and anyone in the area, such as the man in the blue shirt in the photo, could suffer serious or fatal injuries.

Example: An assistant manager at a store in Massachusetts was hospitalized after

boxes of patio furniture and other stock, weighing up to 53 pounds each, fell and struck him in the store's rear stockroom. An investigation by OSHA found that numerous boxes were stacked high and in an unstable condition throughout the storeroom [*Big Lots*, OSHA News Release, Oct. 6, 2015].

TAKE 6 STEPS

Across Canada, the OHS regulations in each jurisdiction address safe storage of materials. In general, employers should take these following steps to comply with such materials storage requirements:

Step #1: Use Proper Storage Racks

Storage racks are commonly used to store materials in warehouses, distribution centres, retail stores and manufacturing plants. But if these racks are improperly installed or used, or become damaged in some way, they can endanger workers. (Use this checklist to inspect the storage racks in your workplace to ensure that they're safe.)

Step #2: Ensure that Stacks of Materials Are Safe

If materials are stored in stacks or piles, such as the bags in this picture, ensure that such stacks don't endanger workers. For example, brace, strap, cross-tie or otherwise restrain stacked materials or containers to prevent them from collapsing or falling from the pile. And ensure that stacks aren't piled to a height that could endanger their stability.

Step #3: Take Extra Care Storing Certain Materials

Certain materials, such as loose/bulk materials, may be subject to specific or additional storage requirements. So check your OHS regulations for such requirements and comply with them.

For example, stacks of bagged material such as the ones in the picture should be stabilized or cross-tied to prevent movement. In addition, the bags should be placed with the mouths of the bags facing inwards. And you may need to step back the tiers of bags depending on the stack's height.

Step #4: Ensure Storage Area Itself Is Safe

Also ensure that the areas around stacks, piles and storage racks are safe. For example, stacks of materials shouldn't be located underneath energized electrical power lines. The aisles between racks should be wide enough for the safe operation of powered mobile equipment and kept free of obstacles. And stored materials shouldn't interfere with or block:

- Lighting;
- Ventilation;
- Doors or windows;
- Passageways or traffic lanes;
- The operation of machines;
- Sprinklers and firefighting equipment; or
- Electrical panels.

Step #5: Implement Safe Storage Rules and Practices

Create and implement rules and practices for the safe storage of materials and safe removal of those materials from storage. For example, bar workers from stacking materials too high or overloading racks beyond their safe load limits. And require workers to report any damage to such racks as soon as is practical.

Step #6: Train Workers on Safe Materials Storage

Be sure to train workers on your safe materials storage rules and procedures as well as the requirements in your jurisdiction for storing materials.

And here are eight basic safe stacking tips you can share with workers:

1. Ensure that materials aren't stacked so high that they're in danger of toppling over or collapsing.
2. Store heavy and unstable items as low as possible to the floor.
3. Ensure that loads are properly secured against movement on pallets, and that pallets are in good condition and the appropriate size and type for the load.
4. Where possible, try to stack articles of the same size and weight together.
5. When stacking bags or bundles of material, alternate rows. For example, place one row running lengthwise, the next running widthwise, the third lengthwise, etc.
6. Ensure there's adequate space to allow workers, forklifts and other lifting devices to navigate the workplace safely and efficiently.
7. Block or chock the bottom tiers of round items so that they don't shift or roll.
8. Ensure that materials aren't stacked so high that they block sprinklers, could come into contact with ignition sources or are near energized electrical wires.