

# Spot The Safety Violation: The Aftermath of Safety Incidents



What would you do to ensure the safety of workers trying to clean up this mess'



Employers have a duty to protect workers from getting hurt in safety incidents, such as vehicular accidents, fires and collapses of scaffolding. But it's also important to protect them when dealing with the *aftermath* of these incidents.

For example, this picture from Great Britain's Health and Safety Executive (HSE) shows the aftermath of the collapse of stacks of boxes of frozen fish in a cold storage area. No one was hurt when the boxes initially fell. But a worker was helping to clear up the mess when there was another fall of boxes, which struck and killed him.

An HSE investigation into the incident found that there was no safe system of work or instruction to staff on how pallets should be stored. And there was no written procedure for dealing with falls of stock when they occurred. The fish company pleaded guilty to a safety offence and was fined £500,000.

Here's how the pallets looked before the collapses:



The boxes were neatly stacked on pallets. But aside from the wrapping on some stacks, there are no braces, straps or other means of keeping the piles stable or from falling off the pallets.

Also, the stacks of boxes are so high they practically touch the ceiling that they clearly pose a danger to anyone in the area. Frankly, it's no wonder that they collapsed.

**6 STEPS TO SAFE MATERIALS STORAGE**

Although improperly handling or moving materials can endanger workers, this incident is a reminder that improperly *storing* materials can be every bit as hazardous. That's why the OHS regulations cover safe storage of materials. As a general rule, employers should take the following steps to comply with such 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 boxes of frozen fish in these pictures, 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.

### **Step #4: Ensure Storage Area Itself Is Safe**

Also ensure that the areas around stacks, piles and storage racks are safe. For example, 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 have procedures for safely dealing with situations in which materials *do* collapse or fall from storage racks. (But don't forget to comply with any requirements under the OHS laws for safety incidents, such as reporting designated incidents and not disturbing the scene.)

### **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.