



Risktopics

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Preventing slips, trips and falls (STF) in the trucking industry

Introduction

Falls are the second largest source of injury in the workplace following vehicle accidents. A significant number of these falls involve workplace related vehicles such as trucks. Falls from as low as four feet can result in serious injury and possibly even death. Trucking is one of the top five industries with high claims, and a study of Zurich's workers' compensation claims for transportation customers revealed that slip, trip and fall (STF) related truck driver injuries have resulted in over 74 million dollars, equaling 24% of the overall claim frequency and 25% of the overall claim severity over the past 3 years.

While falls are the most common incidents, they are also among the most preventable. In many cases, the worker can prevent a fall if he/she moves carefully and remains alert and conscious of slip and fall hazards.

Types of falls

There are two primary categories of falls: falls at same level (i.e., slipping while walking to and from the vehicle) and falls from elevations (i.e., falling while entering or exiting the tractor cab). The area where most falls occur for drivers, which tends to be a combination of these two, is on or near the tractor. According to the American Trucking Association, 40% percent of falls occur on or around the loading dock, 20% occur during vehicle ingress/egress, and 10% occur during trailer to tractor hookup.

Slip, trip and fall hazards

There are various hazards that workers face everyday. Consider the following list:

- Loading docks
 - Gaps between truck and dock and climbing the dock ladder
 - Debris such as string, shrink wrap, and loose freight
- Vehicle access
 - Accessing the trailer for loading, tarping and securing the load and hatch inspection
 - Climbing the vehicle to clean lights and windshields
 - Lack of a three point contact on the vehicle at all times

- Ramps, parking lots, walking surfaces, garages, wash bays and fuel areas
 - Change in elevation leading into a warehouse or loading ramps leading into a trailer
 - Uneven surfaces, poor lighting/visibility, unfamiliar location, ice, snow and rain
 - Spilled fuels and oils mixed with water, and soapy wet floors in restrooms and showers
- Inside trailers
 - Metal trailer floors
 - Wet floors
 - Improper use of pallets or freight as stepladders
- Loading/unloading freight
 - Obstructed sight when carrying objects

Add in the likelihood of workers acting hastily, inattention to the task, complacency, horseplay and fatigue and STF exposure rises. Also, the worker's overall fitness and health can affect the driver's dexterity and agility.

Ways to prevent falls

What sets the successful companies apart from the unsuccessful ones in STF prevention is management commitment and emphasis on prevention of the problem from the very first day a driver is employed by the company. A successful company promotes and educates STF prevention from the first contact, usually as early as during the medical examination with the physician and initial road test.

Preventing STFs are more than common sense. They usually are the result of strict company policies and engineering controls with the ultimate goal of hazard elimination. The prevention of STFs is the responsibility of everyone within the company, not just management and not just the employees.

Review the following safe work practices and compare with your company:

Recommended management practices

- Encourage driver wellness programs and back stretching exercises.
- Ensure automatic dock plates are functioning properly.
- Provide adequate lighting in and around the trucks.
- Equip freight beds with handholds and stepladders.
- Prohibit drivers to jump from the freight bed or from the dock to the ground.
- Maintain dock plates in good working order – over time, the plates can warp and begin to wobble when walked on.
- Equip trailers and cargo beds with handholds and steps or other non-slip stepping surfaces.
- Post signs directing drivers to walkways.
- Specify trailers so hook up can be done from ground level.
- Install and use tarping stations when applicable.
- Install fall protection systems when applicable.
- Keep shipping doors closed until trucks are parked and wheels chocked.
- Prohibit warehouse access from loading dock.
- Encourage team lifting.
- Require non-skid footwear for all drivers with no exceptions.
- Implement functional capacity testing program to conduct pre-employment physicals to ensure that the applicant is physically capable to perform the tasks required for the job.
- Promptly investigate all STFs and near misses to prevent future incidents.

Administrative and training recommendations

- Drivers
 - Avoid using dock ladders whenever possible.
 - Don't jump off dock or stand on pallets.
 - Restrict drivers from accessing garage, tank wash, or other specialized locations they are not trained to access.

- Face toward the edge when walking close to the truck bed edge.
- Park in well-lit areas.
- Review paperwork before exiting truck or shipping areas.
- Keep your eyes focused on the direction that you are walking.
- Team lift when possible.
- Ensure you don't block your view while carrying materials.
- Housekeeping
 - Keep trailer floors in good shape.
 - Inspect for holes, nails and other obstructions.
 - Properly dispose of string, shrink wrap, dunnage and other debris, both in and around trucks and shipping docks.
- Vehicle ingress/egress
 - Climb steps safely using the three-point system.
 - Use proper tractor configuration with foot and hand holds and have steps retrofitted with non-skid surfaces.
 - Check deck plates regularly and repair when faulty.
- Housekeeping
 - Maintain trailer floors properly, repair any holes, remove nails and other obstructions.
 - Dispose of string, shrink wrap, dunnage and other debris both in and around trucks and shipping docks.
 - Clean up spills immediately.
 - Keep shipping docks and parking areas clean and in good condition.
 - Sweep trailer floors clean.
 - Place webbing barriers across openings and chains at railroad track openings.

Summary

Falls can lead to pain, discomfort, and loss of normal income for drivers; for a company it can result in workers' compensation claims, medical indemnity payments, lost workdays, and a loss of overall production. By implementing the safe work practices above, you are taking the best approach to controlling the hazardous exposures that your drivers face in their day-to-day job duties. This can lead to fewer STFs within your company. Please take the time to continuously reinforce safety and hazard recognition (posters, decals etc), enforce the policies and rules, take pride in housekeeping and facility maintenance, and encourage employee physical fitness and general wellness.

Consult your Zurich Risk Engineer for help in identifying your exposures and to develop action plans to reduce these costly and frequent incidents.

References

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