



SSU 2007-03

### MANAGING RISK IN A FLEET ENVIRONMENT

*By SeaBright Insurance Loss Control*

**B**ecause of Department of Transportation (DOT) regulations and Commercial Driver Licensing (CDL) requirements, most trucking firms do a good job with compliance--at least in those areas. They maintain drivers' files and drivers' logs; conduct pre-trip and post-trip vehicle inspections; and arrange for substance tests and physical exams. But areas often overlooked in fleet operations are yard activities, maintenance shops and warehousing, which are not covered by DOT regulations. These areas, if neglected, are the source of many occupational injuries as well as financial losses to the company. To assure productive operations, the risks in the yard as well as on the road must get their share of attention.

Let's take a look at what you, the supervisor or terminal manager, can do to control these risks. First of all, don't expect the dispatcher to solve the problem. He or she has enough to worry about getting cargo where it needs to go on time. It's the responsibility of supervisors to spend time with the crew, inspect operations and correct shortcutting or unsafe behaviors.

#### Start By Inspecting Equipment Maintenance Shop Areas:

- **Flammable materials** need to be stored in a fire resistant locker, preferably out of doors and away from welding and cutting activity. This includes storing oily rags in self-closing cans approved for that purpose.
- **Compressed gas cylinders** must be stored in an upright position, secured with a chain or other means to assure they cannot be knocked over. Oxygen cylinders need to be separated from all combustibles including acetylene, propane, oily rags and other materials by at least 20 feet. If acetylene and oxygen *are* stored together, a non-combustible 5-foot high fire wall, with a fire resistant rating of at least 1/2 hour, must separate them.
- **Solvent tanks** that use a flammable solution must be equipped with a self-closing lid and a fusible link must be installed. A better idea is to use a non-toxic/non flammable solvent that not only avoids a fire hazard, but also provides a safer exposure.
- **Bench grinders** need to have tool rests properly adjusted 1/8-inch from the stone, a tongue guard installed 1/4-inch from the stone, and a wheel guard opening of no more than 90°. Guards for portable grinders must permit a maximum exposure angle of no more than 180°. Safety glasses and face shields are a *must* for all grinding operations.
- **Pneumatic tools** require the use of safety glasses, and in many cases goggles must be worn. Shop air systems that are used for blowing off parts need to be regulated to 30 PSI or less. Additionally, shop air systems should utilize steel pipe. PVC pipe can become brittle with age and explode into hundreds of sharp projectiles upon impact.
- **Synthetic slings** used for hoisting in a shop must be inspected regularly and discarded when damaged. Steel chain slings need to be inspected regularly as well, and checked for excessive wear. An inspection log for each steel chain slings should be maintained. Overhead hoists must also be properly maintained and annually inspected by an independent party.
- **Hazard Communication**, which is quite different from Hazmat or Hazwoper regulations, needs to be a part of all maintenance operations, since it involves the personal safety of your employees from chemical exposures. A Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) should be on file for each hazardous substance used and inventoried in your shop. Employees should be given

information and training about all MSDSs for chemicals to which they are exposed. Containers used for storing hazardous chemicals and materials must also be labeled correctly.

- **Housekeeping** in maintenance shops is an area that is often neglected. A clean shop helps increase production by allowing workers to move around more efficiently, and at the same time reduces exposure to trip and fall injuries. Cleaning up oil spills on the shop floor is a must. This means not only applying approved absorbent material, but also taking the time to sweep it up and dispose of it properly.

#### **Take A Close Look At Work Practices During Yard Activities:**

- **Loading flat bed trailers:** This activity accounts for many injuries in the yard. Drivers need to keep out of the area when trailers are being loaded. Never allow workers on the trailer while forklifts or cranes are loading. Never allow workers to come between the load and a fixed object, such as the trailer. Never permit workers to work *beneath* a suspended load.

When employees climb up on the trailer to secure straps, require them to use the steps provided on the tractor--and to be very cautious if the trailer is not hooked to a truck. Also require that they use the steps on the tractor when getting *down* from the trailer. If the trailer is not hooked to a truck, they should climb--never jump--down!

Avoid letting workers tighten binders from the bed of the truck. If something “lets go,” they’ll risk falling off the trailer. Tightening binders from the ground can be done with the use of a small step stool. Then if something lets go there is only a short distance to fall.

- **Making doubles** is an everyday occurrence in many yards and the process of backing the front trailer onto the tongue of the back trailer’s dolly can be dangerous. More than one finger or hand has been injured during this task. Never allow workers to hold the tongue of the dolly while attempting to direct a truck driver that is backing up. This operation requires three people: one is driving the truck, one holding the tongue and another directing the driver. An alternative is to hold the tongue with a forklift, which will allow the forklift operator to observe and adequately direct the truck driver.

#### **Monitor Warehousing, Cross Docking and Van Loading:**

- **Wheel chocks must be in place** when trailers are being loaded at the dock. This *should* be the responsibility of the driver, because many times the warehouse operator never gets outside the building. Nevertheless, the worker at risk is the warehouse worker, so it’s a mistake to assume this will be done by the truck driver. Before moving trailers away from the dock, drivers should go inside the warehouse to make sure the trailer is not still being loaded or unloaded. More than one serious accident has occurred because a van was pulled away from the dock while a forklift was entering or exiting.
- **Forklift operator certification training** is required, including both a written and a practical test governing the use of this equipment. Tests should emphasize the following important rules:
  - Never leave a forklift unattended with the engine running.
  - Always place the forks on the ground when the forklift is parked.
  - Never get out of a forklift until it has *stopped* moving and the parking brake is set.
  - Always slow down for blind corners and sound the horn.
  - Always *back* down a ramp when the forks are loaded.
- **Carbon Monoxide poisoning** is a serious incident, which may take place when forklifts are operated inside a warehouse--especially in the winter when doors are closed to keep out the cold. By manufacturer’s specifications, propane powered forklifts produce 1% carbon monoxide in their exhaust. In a closed warehouse, it is possible to exceed the permissible exposure limit. Carbon monoxide detectors should be installed in all warehouses where forklifts powered by propane or other hydrocarbons are used. In addition, employees should be trained to recognize the first ill health effects of carbon monoxide poisoning, which include headaches, feeling lethargic and nausea.

#### **Conclusion: What’s Important to Supervisors Will Be Important to the Crew**

Managing the fleet to achieve good production levels is a key responsibility of the terminal manager and supervisors, but so is preventing employee injuries and controlling the costs of industrial incidents. Your attitude toward safe work practices sets the tone, establishes expectations and conveys to all employees that safety standards are important--and must be maintained up and down the line. Terminal managers make the difference! Personal inspections of your facilities are the only certain way to ensure that all employees understand and adhere to the company’s safety policies.

#### **How Long Since You’ve Conducted A Personal Walk-Through Safety Inspection?**