

# Safety Matters

Provided by: Associates Insurance Agency

## Loading Dock Fall Hazards

Loading docks are raised platforms at warehouses and other storage facilities used to load and unload goods from commercial vehicles, typically tractor-trailers. Although these platforms can promote the seamless transfer of goods and allow for more efficient delivery and shipping operations, they also present unique safety risks.

Due to their elevated heights, exposed edges and potentially dangerous surfaces, loading docks can often pose significant fall hazards. In the event of such falls, impacted employees could experience serious injuries and bodily trauma. If your work responsibilities require you to use loading docks, it's imperative to understand common fall hazards associated with these platforms and related safety measures.

### Common Fall Hazards

Various factors can increase the likelihood of falls on loading docks, including:

- **Unprotected edges**—If a loading dock's doors are opened without effective barriers or similar safeguards in place, employees are at risk of falling from the platform's edges—a drop that often spans several feet.
- **Trailer separation**—If a tractor-trailer isn't firmly secured to a loading dock or gaps remain between the platform and the vehicle during loading and unloading operations, employees could trip and fall while moving goods.
- **Slippery surfaces**—Adverse weather conditions (e.g., rain or snow) can make a

loading dock wet or icy, making employees more vulnerable to slips and falls on the slick surface. Spilled materials, especially oil and other thick or sticky liquids, could also increase the risk of these incidents.

- **Poor visibility**—Dim lighting and cluttered pathways can reduce overall visibility on a loading dock, making it difficult for employees to clearly identify the platform's edges, gaps, dangerous surfaces or other hazards. This, in turn, could lead to slips, trips and falls.
- **Forklift incidents**—Employees may operate forklifts on loading docks to transport goods to and from the platform. However, forklifts can be affected by unprotected edges or trailer separation, leading to tip-overs and causing operators to fall from extended heights. Forklifts may also collide with nearby employees on foot, pushing them off the loading dock.
- **Unstable loads**—The contents of a tractor-trailer may shift during transfer, making loads unstable and prone to tipping or dropping at the loading dock. These loads may strike nearby employees and cause them to fall from the platform's edges.



### Safety Measures

Considering the risks of loading docks, it's critical to take the following safety precautions when using these platforms:

- **Stay informed.** Be sure to participate in all workplace meetings and training sessions on loading dock hazards, fall protection measures, and safe loading and unloading practices. In addition, regularly review any available workplace documentation (e.g., safety manuals, policies and flyers) regarding these topics.
- **Wear the required personal protective equipment (PPE).** Always use appropriate PPE when working on a loading dock. Depending on the task at hand, this may include nonslip boots, safety gloves, a high-visibility vest, a hard hat and, in some cases, fall arrest systems. Inspect this equipment before and after each use for signs of damage.
- **Ensure physical safeguards are in place.** OSHA requires employers to equip loading docks measuring 4 feet or higher with guardrails, specialized gates or other barriers when tractor-trailers aren't present, thereby minimizing fall hazards at platform edges. Confirm these physical safeguards are in place—and in good condition—before working on a loading dock.
- **Utilize levelers and restraints.** To help prevent trailer separation and related loading dock gaps, it's critical to use all provided dock levelers and vehicle restraints. Even after securing a tractor-trailer to the platform, periodically check connection points to ensure everything remains aligned.
- **Pay attention to safety signage, tools and markings.** As you work on a loading dock, be aware of any warning signage regarding potential fall hazards, wall-mounted mirrors intended to help monitor blind spots, and floor tape that guides foot and vehicle traffic.
- **Uphold proper housekeeping.** Play your part in keeping the workplace clean by following housekeeping protocols and regularly removing clutter, debris and spills from the loading dock. Additionally, ensure all surrounding lighting is working properly to avoid visibility issues. Notify your supervisor of any unaddressed messes or faulty lights.
- **Avoid rushing.** Don't speed through your tasks or assignments on a loading dock, regardless of upcoming deadlines or other work pressures. Always approach the platform carefully and watch for possible hazards. Above all, remember that your safety is always the most important.
- **Report any incidents or concerns.** If you notice any ongoing hazards, near-misses or other safety issues related to loading docks, don't hesitate to inform your supervisor. Doing so can make all the difference in fostering a safer work environment and preventing falls and related injuries.

### Conclusion

While loading docks can be useful, they can also pose considerable fall hazards. By understanding the associated risks and following proper usage guidelines, you can better protect yourself and help prevent potential injuries on the job.

Reach out to your employer for additional workplace safety guidance.