Safe Handling of Wooden Pallets

SafetyNet #: 147

Wooden pallets are very useful in material handling because they allow us to stack and move materials safely and quickly. They are used in almost all industrial and warehouse environments. Although we tend to forget about the hazards associated with pallets, each year many people suffer injuries from mishandling and misusing them.

PALLET LOADING

Pallets come in different sizes and are constructed in various ways. Each size and construction has different weight and load ranges and must be used according to your organizations’ specifications. The size of a pallet and the load on a pallet can affect lifting the pallet safely with a forklift or other material handling equipment. As the load on a pallet shifts from the center, the lifting capacity of the forklift decreases.

PALLET INSPECTION

Before using a pallet, make sure it can be safely stored in a rack with a heavy load. It should be constructed of hardwood and be in good condition. Top and bottom boards should be in place and should not be cracked or have pieces missing. Stringers should be in good repair; if they are damaged, they should be properly repaired with plugs or mending tape. There must be no protruding nails or slivers of wood on the pallet. If it is determined that a pallet is unsafe, it should be taken out of service until it can be repaired.

HANDLING AND USING PALLETS

Always wear leather gloves when handling wooden pallets. Because they are heavy and awkward to carry, move a pallet by standing on its edge and sliding it. Don't throw pallets
because you can injure yourself and damage the pallet. Don’t store pallets on their edges or ends. Pallets stored on edges tend to fall and cause injuries. Walk around pallets and not on them; many falls occur while attempting to walk on a pallet. Separate pallets into stacks of usable pallets and those that need service. Don’t mix unsafe pallets with those ready for use. Don’t manually stack pallets more than 7 or 8 high; use forklifts to make stacks higher. To properly stack pallets, slide the pallet to one side of the stack. Using proper lifting motion, slide the pallet up the side of the stack and onto the top.

SUMMARY
Because pallets are used on a daily basis, material handlers often don’t think about pallet safety. Take the time to think about a large load lifted 20 feet in the air. Will the pallet be sturdy enough to hold it? It takes an effort on everyone’s part to make pallet safety a part of the everyday operation.

Contact
Health and Safety
healthandsafety@ucdavis.edu 530-752-1493
FAX: 530-752-4527

More information