Shipping and Receiving Fact Sheet

WHAT SHOULD I KNOW BEFORE READING ABOUT THIS OCCUPATION?

This profile summarizes the common issues and duties for those working in shipping and receiving. These activities are often done in a warehouse where a wide variety of health and safety concerns can be present because of the work that is done as well as the materials stored in the warehouse. Because each workplace is unique, there is no way to predict all of the possible hazards you may encounter.

This summary focuses on the major duties of shippers and receivers.

What, briefly, does a shipper / receiver do?

Shippers and receivers send, accept, and record the movement of parts, supplies, materials, equipment, and stock to and from an establishment. They are employed by retail and wholesale establishments, manufacturing companies, and other commercial or industrial establishments.

Shippers and receivers perform some or all of the following duties:

- Determine method of shipment and prepare bills, invoices and other shipping documents.
- Assemble containers and crates, pack goods to be shipped, and prepare identifying information and shipping instructions.
- Oversee loading and unloading of goods from trucks, etc.
- Inspect and verify incoming goods against invoices or other documents, record shortages and reject damaged goods.
- Unpack and route goods to appropriate storage areas.
- Maintain internal record-keeping systems.
- May operate forklift, hand truck or other equipment to load, unload, transport and store goods.
- Know safe storage and handling procedures for various chemicals and materials.
- Know proper shipping procedures for transportation of dangerous goods.

What are some health and safety hazards associated with being a shipper/receiver?

Hazards typically fall into one of six general categories as listed below.

Biological

Depending on the materials stored, biological hazards may or may not be present.

There is the potential for infection caused by birds or rodents when working in polluted or old structures. Infections include histoplasmosis (from bird droppings) or hantavirus (from mice droppings).

There is a possibility of exposure to moulds, fungi and bacteria from areas and materials that have had contact with water (e.g., water leak that leads to mould in wood or drywall).

Chemical

Workers may be exposed to a variety of chemicals and materials – some exposure will be as a result of the items stored in the warehouse, other exposures will be from the activities done or equipment used. Examples include:

- hazards related to the toxic materials stored or used such as solvents, sealers and glue.
- plastic fumes from shrink wrap, bag sealers, and plastic strapping welders.
- use of battery powered equipment (battery acid can cause burns to skin and eyes, and battery recharging process produces hydrogen gas which can explode if allowed to build up and where an ignition source is present)
- use of fuel for powered vehicles (propane, gasoline and diesel) which includes exposure to carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide or exhaust fumes (including diesel exhaust) from trucks at the loading and receiving docks, and fork lifts.

Please note: In many cases, the risk of health effects from a chemical is related to the amount of time (duration) and to the amount of the substance (dose) that the individual is exposed to.

Be sure to read the Safety Data Sheet (SDS) for each hazardous product for more information.

Some hazardous products may have properties that can cause harm such as being flammable. Be sure to read instructions and labels carefully.

Ergonomic

There are many situations where physical demands involve force, repetition, awkward postures and prolonged activities. These include:

- standing for long periods of time
- lifting
- working in awkward positions (twisting, bending, etc.). See work-related musculoskeletal disorders for more information
- repetitive manual operations (such as packing small parts quickly, etc.)
- pushing and pulling objects in general
- pushing and pulling hand carts

Some organizations and individuals may inquire about using back belts. Generally speaking, they are not recommended.

If working at a conveyor or belt, repetitive motions, reaching, and lifting may be a concern especially when movements are done quickly and for a long period of time. The following case studies are available as examples and the information can be applied to a variety of situations:

- Bottle Recycling Department of a Brewery
- Fish Processing

Physical

Workers may be required to work outdoors. As a result, they may be exposed to extreme temperatures (both cold and heat) and ultraviolet (UV) radiation.

Where the temperature in the building cannot be controlled adequately, work may be done in hot environments (especially during summer months). Alternatively, workers assigned to work in cold or frozen storage areas may experience cold stress.

Noise may also be a concern depending on the types of activities carried out.

Safety

Remember to work safely around equipment such as carts, hand trucks, trolleys, trucks, manual forklifts, conveyors, etc. Each will have its own safe work procedures and precautions. For example:

- Conveyers and belts can have “pinch points” – places where your body, body parts, or objects can be entangled or crushed by the moving parts or spinning machinery. Guards must be in place on rollers, wheels, etc. Long hair, loose clothing, and jewellery should be contained.
- Where equipment such as cranes, hoists, slings, carts and others are used for material handling, be sure to use good safety practices.
- Where forklift trucks are used, be sure to follow appropriate safety precautions for the vehicle itself, the operator, and for by-standers.

Appropriate personal protective equipment for the job is essential. For example, eye protection is needed for prevention of injury from flying particles, UV radiation, etc. Different gloves may be needed for different tasks (cutting vs. handling chemicals).

There are many situations where equipment and materials are in various places, or floors are slippery from liquids, etc. The main hazards from these situations are slips, trips, falls. Equipment and materials overhead can also be a hazard (falling material, etc.).

Work done at heights (e.g., on platforms/scaffolding or ladders) require specific safety procedures.

The tools used for the work can also present hazards including:

- hand tools (includes hand saws, hammers, screwdrivers, etc.)
- powered hand tools (includes pneumatic nailing guns, power-actuated tools, circular saws, etc.)

Psychological

Quick turn-arounds, “multi-tasking”, or deadlines may lead to stress felt by individuals.

Some workers may be required to work shifts or extended workdays which can have health effects.

Are there any long-term health effects of being a shipper/receiver?

According to Regulators, health effects can include:

- risk of work-related musculoskeletal diseases (often related to overuse or lifting).
- possibility of exposure to chemicals or materials stored or handled at the warehouse. These effects will vary greatly depending on the substance, and how it was stored or handled.

What are some preventative measures that can be taken?

- Use correct procedures for both manual materials handing (lifting), and materials handling (using cranes, hoists, etc.).
- Be aware of awkward body positions and avoid where possible. If a job requires work in an awkward position (e.g., with hands above shoulder level) or repetition, be sure to take frequent breaks.
- Always use the correct personal protective equipment (PPE) for the task.

- Wear appropriate footwear (for walking/standing, as well as protection from dropped objects).
- Keep all work areas clear of clutter and equipment.
- Know how to handle and store chemicals and materials safely.
- Always make sure that the tools and the safety features of tools and equipment are in good working order before using.
- Follow a recommended shift work pattern and be aware of the hazards associated with shift work.

What are some general safe work practices to know?

Shippers and receivers will need to know:

- material handling procedures
- manual material handling (lifting) techniques
- proper selection, use, maintenance, and storage of PPE, where appropriate
- selection of footwear
- proper procedures for working at heights (e.g., on platforms/scaffolding or ladders)
- proper techniques to work safely with various types of equipment including:
- hand tools (includes hand saws, hammers, screwdrivers, etc.)
- powered hand tools (includes pneumatic nailing guns, power-actuated tools, circular saws, etc.)
- information about shiftwork

All workers should:

- follow company safety rules
- know about WHMIS and SDSs
- know your hazard reporting procedures, and
- follow good housekeeping procedures