

# Talks **ZONE**

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T4011

## Work with pallets can be risky

**M**aterial handling is among the leading causes of workplace injury, and the use of pallets is commonplace in moving or storing materials.

Pallets are so commonplace, in fact, that many workers often don't think about safety when using them. As a result, there is greater risk of getting seriously hurt in a number of ways.

The word pallet refers to a platform that supports goods in a stable manner while they are being loaded or transported. Although most pallets are wooden, they also are made with plastic and metal.

There are pros and cons of every material used for the construction of pallets.

Wooden pallets are a more likely cause of injury because of their construction. Breaks, cracks, splinters and loose nails all pose hazards.

Pallets sometimes hang around even when they have outlived their usefulness and get pressed into service when the good ones are used up.

An obvious remedy, and one that frequently gets overlooked, is regular inspection of pallets for damage. Damaged pallets should either be fixed or discarded.

Wearing gloves is always a good idea, regardless of whether pallets were inspected prior to use. Other personal protective equipment, such as safety shoes, head and eye protection, is also recommended.

Here are some more tips for safe use of pallets:

- Center the load and make sure it is secure before it is moved.
- When stacking several pallets high, keep the first two straight, otherwise the rest could lean and the entire stack could fall.



- Do not overload a pallet. You should know the capacity of the handling device used, such as a pallet jack, forklift or overhead hoist.
- Don't manually stack empty pallets more than seven or eight high. Use a forklift to continue stacking pallets above 1.5 meters (five feet), but make sure each pallet is squarely centered atop the one below.
- There are several methods for efficient storage of loaded pallets. These include block stacking, stacking frames and various kinds of racks.
- Never use pallets to lift people. Only use engineered lift platforms for this purpose, after having received necessary training.
- Avoid standing on pallets. Doing so can result in injury if a board breaks, or if your foot gets caught between boards. Depending upon design, some pallets are prone to tipping when empty.
- Avoid stepping on pallets. Use a "pick hook" to reach an item at the rear of a pallet and pull it forward.

- Stepping between pallets can result in ankle injury can result if you lose balance.
- Move a pallet by standing it on edge and sliding it.
- Do not store pallets on their edges or ends, as they can become unstable and fall.
- Stack pallets by sliding each of them to one side of the stack. Using a proper lifting motion, slide the pallet

up the side of the stack and onto the top. Working with pallets can be a source of musculoskeletal injury (MSI). Examples are lifting empty pallets from a high stack or reaching overhead to get at awkward loads. Forklifts should be used to gain access to pallets higher than shoulder level.

For any manual lifting situation, proper technique is necessary (Bend at the knees and use the strong leg muscles to accomplish the lift. Keep the back straight and stay close to the object being lifted.).

Team lifting also reduces MSI risk, but when mechanical aids are available, use them.

Good housekeeping is an important aspect of pallet handling, as it is with just about any workplace situation.

Keep broken pallet lumber, used strapping and other debris swept up regularly. Stack pallets away from doorways, exits and fire extinguishers. Avoid stacking them in or too close to aisles and heavy traffic areas.

## The Quiz

These questions are meant to help you remember what was discussed today — not to test your patience or challenge your intelligence. The answers are at the bottom of the page. Cover them up, and complete the quiz as quickly as you can.

1. Workers often pay little attention to safety hazards when using pallets.  
TRUE \_\_\_\_ FALSE \_\_\_\_
2. Can pallets be made of materials other than wood?  
YES \_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_
3. Which of these are safe practices when using pallets:
  - A. Center the load on the pallet.
  - B. Know the capacity of mechanical devices being used to move pallets.
  - C. Use damaged pallets only when you have run out of good ones.
  - D. Avoid standing or stepping on pallets.
  - E. All of the above
4. Pallets should be moved by standing them on one edge and sliding them.  
TRUE \_\_\_\_ FALSE \_\_\_\_
5. The best way to stack pallets manually is by:
  - A. Sliding them up one side of the stack and onto the top.
  - B. Tossing them carefully from the front of the stack.
  - C. Using ropes and raising them up the back of the stack.
  - D. None of the above.
6. Working with pallets will NOT result in musculoskeletal injury.  
TRUE \_\_\_\_ FALSE \_\_\_\_
7. Which of these are examples of good housekeeping when working with pallets:
  - A. Regularly sweep up broken lumber, strapping and other debris.
  - B. Do not stack pallets near exits and fire extinguishers.
  - C. Keep pallets away from heavy traffic areas.
  - D. All of the above.
8. Does your workplace use damaged pallets?  
YES \_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_ DON'T KNOW \_\_\_\_

## Hold These Thoughts

Pallet jacks are among the most common mechanical devices used in shipping, receiving and storage operations. While they aren't as dangerous as forklifts, their use can still damage materials and structures, and result in serious injuries.

The first rule of safety with pallet jacks is never to operate one unless you have been trained to do so.

Here are some more:

- Never exceed the manufacturer's maximum load rated capacity. This will be clearly marked on the pallet jack.

- Center the forks evenly under the load to ensure stability of the load. Forks must be positioned completely under the pallet.

- Maintain a clearance of about 2.5 centimeters (one inch) between the floor and the pallet. The load is more stable if it is kept close to the floor.

- Pull, don't push, manual pallet jacks for better control of the load. The exception is to push when going down a ramp.

- Start and stop gradually to prevent the load from shifting position.

- Use established traffic lanes and exercise caution to avoid collisions at corners.

- Ask a spotter to assist you if your view is obstructed.

- Make sure your foot is safely out of the way before you lower a load.

- Park the pallet jack in a level place with the forks lowered.

- Make sure the handle is up and the jack is out of a traffic area so no one will trip over it.

- Don't block exits or emergency equipment, like fire extinguishers.

- Don't speed, and be extra cautious on ramps.

- Never carry riders or ride the equipment yourself.

**ANSWERS:** 1. True, 2. Yes, 3. A., B. D., 4. True, 5. A., 6. False, 7. D., 8. Your answer

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## For the Record

Date of Meeting: \_\_\_\_\_

Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Department: \_\_\_\_\_

Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Finish Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Meeting Leader: \_\_\_\_\_

In Attendance:


## Tips for Safety Meeting Leaders

**Prevent employee “gripe sessions.”** Establish ground rules for your safety meeting right from the beginning. First, an employee who presents a problem should offer a solution. This will facilitate reasonable objectives. Second, discussions that head off on a tangent should be kept to a minimum. Use a timer if necessary. Third, have everyone agree to stay on the subject of safety. This is not the forum to discuss schedules, vacation, salaries, etc.

**Review your progress.** If time allows at this meeting (schedule a special one if necessary) review issues and suggestions raised previously and detail any policy or practice changes that have been

instituted as a result. It is important for employees to see proof of progress in order to believe they can make a difference.

If there has been no progress on an issue, don't try to hide it. Your employees are probably already aware of what hasn't been addressed. Instead, commit to a time when the matter will be addressed and resolved, and follow through on that commitment.

**Get the most** out of your safety meetings by keeping the format consistent and the content meaningful.

**Note: TalksZone safety meetings are not intended to take the place of your own safety procedures. Always consult and/or review your procedures before attempting any work.**