

# TRUCK TALK

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## Loading Dock Safety

While traveling on public highways, the Department of Transportation (DOT) has jurisdiction. However, while loading or unloading trucks, OSHA regulations govern the safety and health of the workers and the responsibility of employers to ensure their safety at the warehouse, at the dock, at the rig, at the construction site, and anywhere truckers got to deliver and pick up loads.

Loading docks are very busy places. Trucks, trailers, forklifts and people move throughout loading areas. There are many hazards located in these areas, and the likelihood of an accident is very real.

Safety starts at the dock approach, so make sure it is in good repair, free from potholes or cracks in the lot surfacing. Ensure that dock bumpers and chock blocks are present and in good repair. Trailer parking lines should be painted and easy to see, and make sure there is ample room to maneuver the trailer for backing up to the dock. Should you need the assistance of somebody on the ground during the backing process, make sure you both understand the hand signals to be used. If you lose sight of the person on the ground, stop the truck and Get Out And Look. You usually do not have the luxury of backing into a dock that is completely open with no obstructions to maneuver around. Backing into a stationary object (such as another truck or trailer or post or dock door) is always considered a preventable accident; you are the person in control of your vehicle, so make sure the way is clear before backing.

A high percentage of dock accidents occur due to vacant dock positions that do not have a trailer parked at them. The typical loading dock is about 4 feet off the ground, posing a fall hazard. NEVER

lean or hang out of a loading dock – there might be a trailer entering that space. That open space is where any available moisture is going to accumulate during inclement weather, which creates a slip, trip, or fall hazard.

Dock levelers or bridges span the space between the dock and the trailer. Some of these are built right into the dock, and others have to be inserted manually. Either way, pinch points are present and can cause a great deal of harm. If you are manually placing a dock plate and it comes down on your toes, the cowboy boots or tennis shoes you have on are not going to protect you from injury. Steel toed non-slip footwear is recommended.

Never walk into a trailer while a forklift is entering or backing out of a trailer. The forklift driver is maneuvering in a tight space with limited visibility and may not be prepared for the presence of another person. Also, once you are there, you really have no place to go should the forklift operator not see you.

Before pulling away from the dock, make sure the dock worker is completely finished with the loading or unloading process, the dock plate has been removed, and that it is OK for you to pull the trailer out and close the doors. 7% of forklift accidents are caused by trailer separation from the dock, and these accidents almost always include a severe personal injury. There is a very good reason why some shippers and receivers require that the driver wait in a designated waiting area as opposed to being in the cab of the truck during loading and/or unloading. This way they know the driver is not going to pull away from the dock until it is safe to do so.

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