



How Warehouse Managers Can Prevent Damaged Stock

You must know the importance of managing your inventory in a way that minimizes damaged stock, but maybe you don't know some of the first practical steps to take toward that goal. Here are some tips for managers looking for ways to keep damage to a minimum and recommit to safety at the same time.

Always Be on the Lookout for Process Improvements

It's tempting to settle for good enough and to assume there's nothing wrong with your current workflow. However, unless and until you've tried out an alternative, you don't have any real frame of reference.

Different workplaces refer to process improvements by various names, including "Kaizen" or "Six Sigma." However, what's important is that managers and employees alike can iron out wasted effort and unnecessary pain points, ultimately developing an environment where damaged stock is rare.

What are you looking for, specifically? Ask your employees about, and make your own observations, concerning the following:

- Do employees touch products more than necessary during regular workflows?
- Are multiple employees involved with manually tracking or handling products? Is this necessary?
- Do product cartons clearly indicate their contents?
- Does incoming or outgoing product sit unattended for longer than necessary?

These aren't the only weak spots you might find in your facility, but they are a great place to start. According to Packaging Digest, as much as 11 percent of incoming goods come into a distribution center already damaged. Requiring additional touchpoints on products, leaving items unattended, and performing rework for mislabeled inventory all expose merchandise to risk.

Invest in Material Handling Equipment Wherever Appropriate

Making a purchasing decision like this can be a tough pill to swallow. There are day-one costs to consider, plus the price of maintenance, and future modification. However, you'll appreciate the ROI of material handling equipment in the form of fewer workplace injuries and less instances of damaged products.

Take a tour of your facility to find out where employees over extend themselves or expose merchandise to risk. Look for places where conveyors would make things safer or more efficient. Does it make sense to add a pallet inverter? Are there places in your warehouse where a hoist is the best choice for moving heavy items? Even just making pallet jacks available in designated areas can improve safety and limit the risk of product damage.

Provide Better Protection for Your Racking

It's not uncommon for products to sustain damage while stowed on shelving. Whether it's careless handling during stowing or due to a brush with a forklift or order picker, your racking is surprisingly vulnerable, and so are the products inside. Here's what to know about racking:

- **Consider weight and shape when designing racking:** Maybe you're designing a new facility or you're saving your pennies for a redesign. When it comes to purchasing new storage racks, take your current and future needs into consideration. Poorly matched racking to the products inside leads to overhanging items in the way of traffic and, therefore, damage.
- **Install racking protection in critical areas:** There are essential pieces of equipment you can purchase to protect your warehouse racking and inventory from damage. Column protectors are a must-have in areas where vehicles travel regularly. Other options include aisle shields, rack guards and pallet supports — all designed to keep products where they belong and prevent situations that can cause damage or pose a danger to somebody working below.

Of course, some kinds of precautions just can't be bought. For everything else, there's employee engagement and training.

Engage Employees in a Culture of Safety

The benefits of training employees on safety come with a reduced risk of personal injury and product damage. Not every workplace incident involves damage to both humans and salable merchandise — but there's certainly overlap.

For instance, the same periodic refresher course you put your forklift operators through won't just keep them safer at the controls — it'll also reduce the amount of merchandise you have to throw away as collateral damage in workplace incidents.

The other part of maintaining a culture of safety is about knowing your employees' limits. Products get damaged, and people get hurt, when employees are pushed past reasonable expectations. If you find your employees are damaging products on the job or getting injured, and still falling short of your pick and stow rates, it's a sign you need to slow down and recommit to safety.

Redesign or Retrofit Your Facility

When do lots of workplace accidents happen? In many cases, it's when our visibility is compromised. Newer warehouse designs tend to incorporate powerful yet energy-efficient overhead lighting, oftentimes rigged to motion sensors to achieve energy savings. If your own facility has gone without a look at lighting, you might be surprised by the difference an upgrade can make in morale, safety and effective product handling.

More illuminative lighting can help reduce mishandling that results in drops and bumps to merchandise. You might also notice that cleaner lighting reduces packing and labeling errors, too. When employees on the ground and those operating heavier machinery can see their surroundings more clearly, they feel more confident. That means a safer environment for employees and products alike.

Clean up — and Keep It Clean

Finally, let's end with a note on cleanliness. It's a lesson we should've been learning since childhood, but the basics can slip our minds when there are deadlines to meet and orders to fulfill.

Bottom line? Push for a cleaner facility. Stop leaving shrink-wrap on the floor or buying brittle wooden pallets only to find pieces of wood strewn throughout your warehouse. Create a well-marked area for each tool and piece of equipment so employees know where to go to handle a task safely. Using the right tool for the job in a warehouse setting is crucial.

There are many ways to reinvest your energy into creating a safer work environment. The result should be a

reduction in damage sustained and profits lost — plus a happier and safer workplace for your employees.

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We are honoured and appreciate your support throughout the 2018 journey. May you and your dear ones have a peaceful and restful holiday season!!

Our annual year end shut down will be from the 21st of December 2018 and our offices will re-open on the 7th of January 2019. Julie will be available remotely on email and/or mobile 082 550 0959 to attend to any urgent matters (julie@orangerecruiting.co.za)



Orange Recruiting (Pty) Ltd
Company Registration Number: 2005/041787/07
Tel: +27 11 807 8102 | +27 82 550 0959
www.orangerecruiting.co.za
P O Box 5322, Rivonia, 2128,
357 Rivonia Boulevard, Rivonia