

Inventory Safety

'Tis the season to be jolly. And, on a more prosaic note, 'tis also the season for year-end inventory. This annual event presents both a challenge and an opportunity for safety managers. The challenge is to prevent injuries to workers who participate in inventory, especially if they will be working outside their normal scope of duties and/or physical location. The opportunity arises from the fact that the exercise of counting and cleaning involves making "things" across the plant visible. This gives you a golden opportunity to identify and eliminate hazards that you might not have noticed during the year. Let's look at how to handle both the challenge and opportunity.

The Challenge

During the annual inventory event, workers suddenly may be tasked with counting widgets. Consequently, they might perform tasks they don't normally perform, such as accessing materials on racks, and work in areas of the plant where they don't normally work, such as warehouses. This may involve hazards.

Before sending workers off to unfamiliar tasks and territory, hold a safety meeting. Your plant's features and company rules will determine what to cover at the meeting. Here are some examples of points to emphasize:

- Techniques for counting and identification of materials stored on racks should be explained. Stress that under no circumstances is anyone to climb on racks or stand atop a forklift. Ladders must be used and used safely.
- Proper lifting techniques must be used. Where needed, workers should work in pairs or use a forklift.
- Workers should be cautioned that material handling, especially steel parts and chemicals, can lead to hand injuries. Workers must use proper hand protection.
- Workers should be warned not to wander into areas they don't belong; they may be unaware of the hazards.
- Workers should understand that they must wear safety glasses, as always, in all areas of the plant - NO exceptions.
- Remind workers to be alert. Inventory times can lull people, supervisors included, into complacency because "we're not working." Issue a reminder: When you let your guard down, you get bitten!



The Opportunity

During the annual inventory, the plant may also be getting "cleaned" in areas normally overlooked. This can be a gold mine - or a landmine - for safety! This is a great chance to uncover hazards that have been lurking beneath the surface throughout the year, such as unlabeled chemicals, worn or broken fixtures, extension cords, etc.

But you can only take advantage of these discoveries if you're physically present and have specifically asked your supervisors and lead people to bring these items to your attention.

Conclusion

In conclusion, think of inventory not as a boring chore but as a safety event - an annual search for hazards lying around your workplace. Take advantage of this opportunity that only comes once a year. And make sure that your workers are equipped and instructed to do it safely. If you do, you'll ensure a safe and happy holiday season - and new year as well!

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