

TOOLBOX TALK

DISCUSSION TOPIC: STORING & HANDLING MATERIALS



A range of hazards and risks

From filing cabinets and shelves to trolleys, storage and moving systems can present a range of hazards and risks to employees. Consider the following information when assessing hazards and risks from office shelving and storage systems and when implementing risk controls.

Shelving systems

Users need to have clear access to shelving systems and the items stored on them. Achieving the necessary level of access will sometimes require a redesign or additional equipment. For example, large shelving systems often have a top level of shelving that is above head height or shelves may be too deep, requiring staff to bend and reach in. Redesigning shelving and relocating items between knuckle and shoulder height should be considered. If this is not practicable, consider the following controls:

- ✓ a safe means of climbing up to the required level
- ✓ an intermediate support point to enable lifting or lowering in stages as users step to higher levels

Climbing shelves to access higher shelves is an unsafe practice and a risk that requires control. Options for control of this risk may include providing small platforms on rollers, as often found in libraries, small sets of stepladders, platform ladders and rolling ladders. Steps should be stable, and platforms and handrails are required where the work includes access to high storage.

If employees have to climb above 2m, employers must comply with the requirements of the Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2017 (OHS Regulations) Part 3.3. Even if the risk of a fall is below 2m an employer still has an obligation to manage the risk, so far as reasonably practicable, and to maintain a working environment that is safe and without risks to health.

General principles of storage areas

- ✓ Large or heavy items should be stored at easily accessible heights to minimise the demands of handling. Frequently handled items should be placed within easy reach. Items carried on a trolley should remain on the trolley while in storage
- ✓ Smaller, lightweight and infrequently handled items may be stored in the lower or higher areas of a storage system
- ✓ It should be easy to place items into the storage unit and to take them out

- ✓ The storage system should accommodate the size and shape of the item being stored. For example, dividers will secure files stored in shelving and improve access to them. Documents or small publications may be stored in suspension files or folders, making them easier to handle

Stacking materials

- ✓ Material and equipment must be placed, stacked or stored in a stable and secure manner.
- ✓ Stacked material or containers must be stabilized as necessary by interlocking, strapping or other effective means of restraint to protect the safety of workers.

Storage racks

- ✓ In this section, "*storage rack*" means a combination of steel frames, beams and associated accessories used, once assembled into a structure, to support materials and products
- ✓ This section applies in respect of a storage rack that is
 - **2.4 m (8 ft) or taller in height, as measured from the floor to the top of the highest shelf level of the storage rack, or**
 - **under 2.4 m (8 ft) in height, if the materials and products are loaded on or unloaded off the storage rack by other than manual means**
- ✓ The employer must ensure that a qualified person installs and uninstalls the storage rack, in whole or in part, in accordance with the instructions of the manufacturer or a professional engineer
- ✓ The employer must ensure that a storage rack in the workplace is capable of safely supporting the items stored on it
- ✓ The employer must ensure that, with respect to the storage rack, regular maintenance is done
- ✓ The area must be regularly safety inspected by the OH&S Committee Members, and provide any recommendations to the employer