

Surely Warehouses Need Safety Too

By: **Rolly Clendening**, *Contributor*

When was the last time you were witness to a “near-miss forklift accident” at a busy intersection in your warehouse or distribution center? Chances are the memory is not that distant if you are one of those forklift drivers. The sad truth is that there are safety directors that have had to experience these events under their watch and what’s worse is that they’re sometimes limited by budget restraints to properly resolve these problems.

Outfitting a safe facility doesn’t need to be a major investment, but the delay in planning can be costly when an injury accident occurs. The most important thing you can do is work with a qualified manufacturer representative or safety professional to construct a plan to fit your facility’s driving culture and intersection traffic.

Recently I was called to provide a full-site mirror survey at a major retailer’s distribution center where a serious injury related accident had occurred. When I arrived, there wasn’t a single safety mirror in the building. Previously there hadn’t been any major accidents, but this single event would prove expensive for this corporation due to the extent of the employee’s injuries. Mirrors at the intersections had been considerations in the past but were never followed up on, a costly delay. To this company’s credit, it already had us in for mirror surveys in several of their distribution centers and have equipped their forklifts with blue-light warning devices, plus had added safety signage.

SAFETY SOLUTIONS

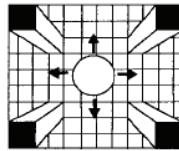
Honking horns and stopping at all intersections are the beginning of good driving habits. Warnings of approaching traffic make a facility safer and more effective in preventing expenses of damaged product due to intersection congestion. Hi-Vis vests, gloves and harnesses also come into play when focusing on employee safety in the material handling facilities.

There are Blue Light Alert Systems available that attach to the forklifts where the light pattern extends beyond the vehicle to warn others of their location. Projection units are also used to display stop signs and safety messages on the floor at intersections.

Motion detectors can be mounted above or near intersections to warn forklift operators and pedestrians of traffic coming from multiple directions. Some of these units are attached to mirrored domes to supply a view from floor level, along with the warning sensor that indicates the direction of an approaching vehicle or pedestrian near the intersection.

Mirrors are an immediate visual indicator of intersections and blind spots to both drivers and pedestrians. There are different styles of mirrors designed for various types of intersections and problem areas.

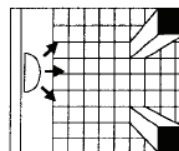
Full Dome Mirrors suspended at the center of a 4-way intersection, provide a 180-degree viewing angle from all four directions. Having a view of a forklift or pedestrian around a corner will give a forklift operator the opportunity to come to a smooth stop, keeping the vehicle and the transported load under control.



Full Dome Mirrors suspended at the center of a 4-way intersection, provide a 180-degree viewing angle from all four directions.

The domes should be mounted as low as possible, but still about 1-2ft above the highest moving forklift mast or product stack. A rule of thumb for your mirror size choice, is one inch of mirror diameter will provide at least one foot of viewing distance in each direction. (36in would provide 36 + ft of viewing). For intersections that do not allow a dome to be hung due to overhead storage or utility congestion, convex and DomeVex Mirrors can be vertically mounted on a nearby wall, rack or post to show blind spot viewing angles.

Three Way or “T” Intersections can cause concern for choosing the right mirror, given the individual obstacles within the location. Generally, a Half Dome Mirror can be mounted on the wall or rack from the closed direction. A newer solution is the option of using a larger DomeVex Mirror that displays a 180-degree view, mounted at eye-level for optimum exposure in all three directions.



Three Way or “T” Intersections can cause concern for choosing the right mirror, given the individual obstacles within the location.

LOOKING AT COST

Cost is a driving force when considering your plan. Management would rather not spend a lot of their budgets on non-productive expenses, but there are various ways to evaluate the development of a safety program. Employees need and appreciate the confidence of working in a safe working environment that their company has provided. Plus, physical injuries are very expensive, both in medical bills and lost-time workers compensation costs. Products damaged in an accident are another cost, along with the time lost in clean up and replacing the damaged items.

A beneficial point to consider is the reduced insurance premiums after audits show that your company is being proactive against costly accidents. The combination of mirrors, warning systems and a defined safety program will pay dividends in the long run. ***WMHS***