



Distribution Center MANAGEMENT

Managing people, materials and costs in the warehouse or DC

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■ From the Golden Zone

DC experts offer management tips for 2015

The economy continues to accelerate, but the pressures on DC managers aren't slowing. Expect another year of relentless competition and demands for greater efficiency.

How can you maintain quality while hacking away at waste? During 2014, we asked dozens of DC managers and consultants to tell us what worked for them. A sampling of their advice follows.

Track your forklifts

A new generation of fleet optimization systems (FOS) promise better visibility into your forklifts, say Norm Saenz and Steve Sepmore of St. Onge Co. With FOS, forklift vendors are providing more information than ever before about your fleet — and new ways to answer those questions that have puzzled DC managers in the past.

FOS lets you track the use and maintenance of your lift trucks. Most FOS packages include a verification process to ensure every forklift operator is properly authorized. The systems also give managers control of the OSHA vehicle checklist.

The FOS will provide information by operator, so managers can see the breakdown of hours each department is putting on each forklift. If a forklift sits idle more than 20 percent of the time, managers must ask what can be done to increase the number of hours to improve the efficiency of each forklift. Managers can also study the numbers provided by the FOS and pose more intelligent questions.

Accidents often happen in the late hours, when nobody is around. The FOS impact-reporting feature lets you set impact ratings in G-force. If an operator hits something and the collision falls into the range you've specified, you'll get an email alert.

Focus on forklift safety

If your forklift operators are challenged by obstructed views, you'd better make sure they're driving in reverse. That's the lesson from a workplace death after a forklift hit a pedestrian. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) in May announced \$168,700 in proposed penalties after a worker at Nicholson Terminal & Dock Co. in Detroit was killed by a forklift loaded with a 40,000-pound steel coil.

Dave Hoover of Forklift Training Systems says the lesson is clear: If you can't see clearly enough to know if you're about to hit someone, back up instead.

The obstructed view is a constant concern in distribution centers, Hoover says. Forklift operators often deal with clumsy loads by trying to look over the top, or by peering through the cracks in the load — a dangerous approach.

"The problem is that you're seeing 20 percent and missing the other 80 percent," Hoover says.

That obstructed vision leads to obvious safety issues. Driving in reverse can be awkward — the position can strain an operator's back. Still, it's

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