



Distribution Center MANAGEMENT

Managing people, materials and costs in the warehouse or DC

To ensure effective dock operations, follow these rules for managing dock supervisors

By *Brian Hudock*

The dock is a crucial area of any DC. Decisions made on the dock affect every part of your operation, from productivity to customer service to profitability to the ultimate survival of the company.

Given that reality, the dock supervisor is a key manager.

Because dock supervisors set the standard for employees, they must know what is expected of them by their managers and be trained to effectively execute the manager's plan.

Dock supervisors need to understand the power of performance management and use performance logs or a dock management system to monitor production, checking them every hour.

Dock supervisors should establish safety rules and methods and ensure that these rules are understood and followed.

To get dock supervisors started, consider these rules for loading and trailer preparation, dock management, and staff management:

Loading and trailer preparation

- Rule number one is to ensure that the trailer is secured prior to entering it.
- Place heavy freight on the bottom, light freight on the top.
- Stage freight behind the trailers as necessary.

- Maximize the amount of freight loaded on a trailer (increase load average).

- Make sure freight is evenly distributed. Use the 1,000 pounds per foot rule.

- Use rope or load bars to secure freight.

Train a small number of employees in the proper techniques. These employees can train the remaining associates.

- Ensure that pallet loads are stable and stretch-wrapped, taped, or banded as necessary to prevent damage during transit.

- Use crisscross or horizontal versus vertical stacking.

- Verify piece counts.

- Know and follow the rules for handling hazardous materials.

- Ensure a well-cubed trailer to prevent damage, enhance equipment life, reduce dispatches, and cut costs.

- Check weight and loading technique after every quarter of the trailer is loaded. This avoids poor loading and trailer overload. If a mistake is made on a trailer (poor loading technique, misloading), locate the employee who made the mistake and have him or her correct it.

- Be aware of pup and cube usage. Pups (26-foot trailers) have 15 percent more cubic capacity

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than the standard 45-foot trailer. Pups should be used for bulky carton type freight. Load more dense freight onto conventional units.

- Load freight with labels out. This assures freight has been checked and makes off-loading at destination easier.

- Keep shipments together for ease of unloading at destination.

- Save a cartload of small freight on the dock to aid in closing the load. This cartload will help employees fully cube the trailers. Down-stack the last freight so that tiers are created to keep the freight from toppling.

If you have assigned forklift operators, they should constantly be moving.

- Promote the “cart-load factor.” Use “double-

sized” carts or encourage employees to push or pull two carts — but remember, always consider safety first.

- Encourage employees to load carts to capacity and combine orders in one cart when possible.

- Use the correct tools. Strive to reduce palletized freight. Palletization of freight requires double handling and the increased use of forklifts. Never use pick-up and delivery handtrucks on the dock. The dock cart should be the primary tool for moving freight.

Dock management

- Control the docking of freight. Dock only as a last resort. Excessive docking is usually an indicator of weak or uninvolved supervision. Docking of freight always results in double handling, double checking, and increased cost. Unnecessary and uncontrolled docking of freight is a primary cause of poor dock production.

- Establish and enforce housekeeping rules. Sweep dock aprons and empty trash bins during every shift, stage full carts with handles out to the aisle and keep all aisles open, pull nails, remove blocking, and perform visual inspection.

Apply dunnage (cardboard) under pails and drums, where metal meets metal, around sharp

or jagged edges, and on top of plastic bags or other freight that might damage easily. Cardboard acts as a cushion and will also help absorb liquid should there be a leak. Pallets may also be used as dunnage to help keep a load from shifting.

- Minimize the number of carts on the dock. A good rule of thumb is seven carts per unload area.

- Keep the work in front of employees. Pre-plan all assignments before the employees punch in. Have trailers up to dock, doors opened, bills sorted, and tools ready at the start of the shift. Always maintain backup assignments.

- Do not allow food or beverages on the dock. And no smoking — it’s a safety hazard and a productivity killer.

- Set up and coordinate an orderly bill flow from office to dock. Encourage the office (or rate department) to release bills to the dock as soon as they are completed.

- Maximize use of forklifts. If you have assigned forklift operators, they should constantly be moving. Forklifts should always be loaded when moving toward a load area. A dock management system will help plan moves to reduce the amount of empty move time. To help supervisors monitor forklift utilization, assign an area to park the lift that is near the supervisor’s workstation. This area is only used when no work is available for the forklift operator. During slow periods, assign forklift operators loads of empty pallets or docked freight to move.

Staff management

- Follow a set procedure for supervisor changeover, including: walking the dock to determine the status of all staged freight and reviewing a list of all employees and their assignments.

- Organize supervisor responsibilities. Each supervisor should be given specific responsibili-

ties. Avoid situations involving “dual” responsibilities for duties. Each supervisor should know exactly what is expected of him or her each day. Supervisors should know which employees report to them.

- Watch for employees who “thumb” the paperwork. Some employees will rehandle the same paperwork over and over without ever working the freight. Instruct employees on what is expected and enforce it. Watch employees to ensure that unnecessary conversations do not take place.

- Ensure that loaders are not waiting for forklifts. Require use of pallet jacks whenever possible, and make sure forklift work is not being created by unnecessarily palletizing freight or moving pallets under 200 pounds.

- Remember this law of physics: A body at rest tends to stay at rest. If dock operations require constant mounting and dismounting from vehicles, consider stand-up vehicles as they reduce the ergonomic and productivity

concerns with getting on/off vehicles as well as encourage operators to leave the vehicle when needed.

- Use good leadership techniques. Address poor performance or bad habits immediately, and compliment employees on a job well done. Set high standards by promoting quality and quantity — don’t compromise on either area.

- Understand your employees. What are their goals? What motivates them? Use this knowledge to enhance motivation.

- When confronting employees, critique the behavior and not the individual. When complimenting, praise the individual.

- Communicate with employees. Schedule regular shift meetings that are conducted by supervisors and service center managers. Hold these meetings to address productivity goals, dock methods, safety, and quality. Managers should conduct a similar meeting with supervisors prior to the employee shift meetings.

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