



Distribution Center MANAGEMENT

Managing people, materials and costs in the warehouse or DC

Safety and Security

As marijuana harvest season approaches, keep an eye out for shipments of illicit drugs

It was a scene seemingly ripped from the pages of a paperback novel. At 5:30 one morning, a worker at the Mopar Parts Distribution Center in Center Line, MI, opened a box of windshield wiper blades and found two 10-pound blocks of marijuana.

The scenario is an all-too-common one for warehouses that handle product shipped from Mexico.

In this case, DC workers called the police, who used dogs to search the rest of the pallets delivered in the shipment. They found no other drugs. Authorities pegged the pot's street value at \$20,000 to \$30,000.

Police wouldn't identify the source of the shipment except to say that it came from a supplier in the southwestern United States.

That detail didn't surprise J.J. Coughlin, a former police officer and current director of law enforcement services at LoJack Supply Chain Integrity. Coughlin says Mexican drug runners often intercept cargo trucks on the Mexican side of the border and hide contraband in the freight on board.

After the shipment crosses the border but before it reaches its final destination, someone in the criminal organization grabs the drugs. This

strategy makes it unlikely that the narcotrafficker will get caught, even if the contraband is found, Coughlin says.

Typically, when a shipment of drugs makes it to a warehouse such as the Mopar DC, it's simply because the bad guys failed to retrieve it, Coughlin says.

"The only way that happened was because that package was supposed to be caught somewhere," Coughlin says.

It's rare for DC employees to be part of a drug organization, or even to keep the illicit drugs that they find, Coughlin says. There's usually such a commotion when a worker finds contraband that everyone on the floor soon gathers around.

"Everybody looks at it, but I don't think anybody rushes to steal it," Coughlin says.

With the marijuana harvest season peaking in the early fall, illicit shipments of pot usually reach a high point in September and October, Coughlin says.

Considering the violence that accompanies the drug trade, it's best that you quickly turn over to the authorities any drugs that you find. You can train employees to spot suspicious packages, Coughlin says. Some red flags:

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- **Mexican origin.** Colombia once was the major source of drugs into the U.S. Now it's Mexico. Many drug shipments that make their way into the supply chain are in orders that originated in Mexico.

- **Packaging that's just too tidy.** Impenetrable packaging or an aroma of dryer sheets are telltale signs. "Drug shipments are always the best packages you'll ever see, because the drug

dealers don't want anybody to see it or smell it," Coughlin says.

- **Mismatched declarations.** If a package's declaration doesn't match its weight, you might want to take a closer look.

Dock drop-offs and pick-ups are another warning sign.

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To weed out drug abuse in the DC, use tip lines, undercover work

Barry Brandman has seen egregious examples of DC drug abuse, including truck drivers using cocaine on the job and a shift supervisor who was part of a warehouse drug ring.

Screening out drug abusers with pre-employment drug tests is only "marginally effective," says Brandman, president of Danbee Investigations, a security consultant for DCs. If he really wants the job, a drug user can clean himself up for long enough to pass a urine test.

Brandman offers three much more effective ways to ferret out drug use:

- **Probable-cause drug tests.** You should conduct a drug test after any accident in your warehouse, Brandman says. However, many DCs neglect to do so for a variety of reasons, including a fear of seeming to discriminate against the worker involved in the accident.

- **Anonymous tip lines.** DC employees really don't want to work alongside drug abusers. But they're also afraid to publicly blow the whistle. Brandman suggests setting up an anonymous tip line where workers can report drug abuse without fear of retribution.

- **Undercover operations.** If you place an undercover investigator on your floor, you might find some startling facts.

Brandman says one of his company's undercover investigations discovered workers taking drugs in an unmonitored part of the warehouse where the slow-moving inventory was stored. Danbee set up hidden surveillance cameras and quickly nabbed the culprits.

"An undercover investigation penetrates the operation, unlike security guards or video cameras, which really only see the surface," Brandman says.

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