

Supervisor at Used Clothing Processing Facility and Warehouse Dies When Struck by Falling Clothing Bales

SUMMARY

On January 4, 2011, a 63-year-old supervisor at a donated used clothing processing facility and warehouse died when she was struck by falling bales of used clothing.

On the day of the incident, a forklift operator was unloading bales of used clothing from a semi-trailer truck parked at a warehouse loading dock. After unloading the bales from the truck, he proceeded to move them to a storage area where he stacked them against a wall beside other stacks of bales.

The area where the forklift operator was stacking the bales was next to a door leading to the company's shoe department. Clothing bales were stacked on both sides of the door. The employees who worked in this room regularly used this door to access the warehouse. The victim, who was the shoe department manager, was walking toward the door after returning from a break. The new bales were stacked six high and had only been in place for a few minutes. As she approached the stack, the forklift operator noticed that the bales had started to move. He called to her "look out!" As she turned to look toward the forklift operator, four bales fell from the top of the stack. One bale hit the lower part of her body, knocking her to the ground, and then a second bale landed on her upper body. The bales weighed from 500 to 780 pounds and measured approximately 48 inches by 60 inches by 33 inches.



The two bales of used clothing that fell on the victim, shown in the bale clamps of the forklift.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Washington State Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation investigators concluded that to protect employees from similar hazards, employers should:

- Perform a job analysis and hazard assessment of bale storage practices. Based on the results of the job analysis and hazard assessment, employers should create a written safe materials stacking guide and train employees on the procedures.
- Ensure that areas in facilities where bales are to be stored should be of sufficient size and adequate layout to accommodate the intended bales, forklift traffic, and pedestrian traffic without exposing employees to the hazard of bales falling from stacks.
- Ensure that bale storage areas are designated and access limited to authorized employees.
- Ensure that bales are in good condition and are stored in a manner that will minimize the hazard of stacks becoming unstable causing bales to fall.
- Implement daily inspections to evaluate the conditions of bale stacks to ensure stability of the stacks and correct any deficiencies that are identified.

SHARP Publication # 52-45-2018_summary. The full version of this investigation report, along with the detailed recommendations and discussions section, can be found at:
www.lni.wa.gov/Safety/Research/Face/Files/CrushedByClothingBale.pdf