

Occupations and Workplaces

Shipping and Receiving

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What should I know before reading about this occupation?

This profile summarizes the common issues and duties for those working in shipping and receiving. These activities are often done in a warehouse where a wide variety of health and safety concerns can be present because of the work that is done as well as the materials stored in the warehouse. Because each workplace is unique, there is no way to predict all of the possible hazards you may encounter.

This summary focuses on the major duties of shippers and receivers.

What, briefly, does a shipper / receiver do?

Shippers and receivers send, accept and record the movement of parts, supplies, materials, equipment and stock to and from an establishment. They are employed by retail and wholesale establishments, manufacturing companies, and other commercial or industrial establishments.

Shippers and receivers perform some or all of the following duties:

- Determine method of shipment and prepare bills, invoices and other shipping documents.

- Assemble containers and crates, pack goods to be shipped, and prepare identifying information and shipping instructions.
 - Oversee loading and unloading of goods from trucks, etc.
 - Inspect and verify incoming goods against invoices or other documents, record shortages and reject damaged goods.
 - Unpack and route goods to appropriate storage areas.
 - Maintain internal record-keeping systems.
 - May operate forklift, hand truck or other equipment to load, unload, transport and store goods.
 - Know safe storage and handling procedures for various chemicals and materials.
 - Know proper shipping procedures for transportation of dangerous goods.
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What are some health and safety hazards associated with being a shipper/receiver?

Hazards typically fall into one of six general categories as listed below. For more information on that issue, prevention, or how to work safely with a hazardous product, click on the links where provided throughout this document.

Biological

Depending on the materials stored, biological hazards may or may not be present.

There is the potential for infection caused by birds or rodents when working in polluted or old structures. Infections include [histoplasmosis](#) (from bird droppings) or [hantavirus](#) (from mice droppings).

There is a possibility of exposure to [moulds, fungi and bacteria](#) from areas and materials that have had contact with water (e.g., water leak that leads to mould in wood or drywall).

Chemical

Workers may be exposed to a variety of chemicals and materials - some exposure will be as a result of the items stored in the warehouse, other exposures will be from the activities done or equipment used. Examples include:

- hazards related to the toxic materials stored or used such as solvents, sealers and glue
- plastic fumes from shrink wrap, bag sealers, and plastic strapping welders

- use of battery powered equipment (battery acid can cause burns to skin and eyes, and battery recharging process produces hydrogen gas which can explode if allowed to build up and where an ignition source is present)
- use of fuel for powered vehicles ([propane](#), [gasoline](#) and diesel) which includes exposure to [carbon monoxide](#), [carbon dioxide](#) or exhaust fumes (including [diesel exhaust](#)) from trucks at the loading and receiving docks, and fork lifts

Please note: In many cases, the risk of health effects from a chemical is related to the amount of time (duration) and to the amount of the substance (dose) that the individual is exposed to. For more information, please see the OSH Answers document [What makes chemicals poisonous?](#). Also see the [Chemical and Materials](#) section in OSH Answers for storage and handling information on various "families" of chemicals and materials.

Be sure to read the Safety Data Sheet (SDS) for each hazardous product for more information. For general information on SDSs, please refer to our OSH Answers document [WHMIS 2015- Safety Data Sheet \(SDS\)](#).

Some hazardous products may have properties that can cause harm such as being [flammable](#). Be sure to read instructions and labels carefully.

Ergonomic

There are many situations where physical demands involve force, repetition, awkward postures and prolonged activities. These include:

- [standing](#) for long periods of time
- [lifting](#)
- working in awkward positions (twisting, bending, etc.). See [work-related musculoskeletal disorders](#) for more information
- repetitive [manual operations](#) (such as packing small parts quickly, etc.)
- [pushing and pulling](#) objects in general
- pushing and pulling [hand carts](#)

Some organizations and individuals may inquire about using back belts. Generally speaking, they are not recommended. Please see the OSH Answers on this topic document for [more information](#). A [back injury prevention](#) program is recommended instead.

If working at a conveyor or belt, repetitive motions, reaching, and lifting may be a concern especially when movements are done quickly and for a long period of time. The following case studies are available as examples and the information can be applied to a variety of situations:

- [Bottle Recycling Department of a Brewery](#).
- [Fish Processing](#)

Physical

Workers may be required to work outdoors. As a result, they may be exposed to [extreme temperatures](#) (both cold and heat) and [ultraviolet \(UV\) radiation](#).

Where the temperature in the building cannot be controlled adequately, work may be done in [hot environments](#) (especially during summer months). Alternatively, workers assigned to work in cold or frozen storage areas may experience [cold stress](#).

[Noise](#) may also be a concern depending on the types of activities carried out.

Safety

Remember to work safely around equipment such as carts, hand trucks, trolleys, trucks, manual forklifts, conveyors, etc. Each will have its own safe work procedures and precautions. For example:

- [Conveyers and belts](#) can have "pinch points" - places where your body, body parts, or objects can be entangled or crushed by the moving parts or spinning machinery. Guards must be in place on rollers, wheels, etc. Long hair, loose clothing, and jewellery should be contained.
- Where equipment such as cranes, hoists, slings, carts and others are used for [material handling](#), be sure to use good safety practices.
- Where [forklift trucks](#) are used, be sure to follow appropriate safety precautions for the vehicle itself, the operator, and for by-standers.

Appropriate [personal protective equipment](#) for the job is essential. For example, [eye protection](#) is needed for prevention of injury from flying particles, UV radiation, etc. Different [gloves](#) may be needed for different tasks (cutting vs. handling chemicals).

There are many situations where equipment and materials are in various places, or floors are slippery from liquids, etc. The main hazards from these situations are [slips, trips, falls](#). Equipment and materials overhead can also be a hazard (falling material, etc.).

Work done at heights (e.g., on [platforms/scaffolding](#) or [ladders](#)) require specific safety procedures.

The tools used for the work can also present hazards including:

- [hand tools](#) (includes hand saws, hammers, screwdrivers, etc.)

- [powered hand tools](#) (includes pneumatic nailing guns, power-actuated tools, circular saws, etc.)

Psychological

Quick turn-arounds, "multi-tasking", or deadlines may lead to [stress](#) felt by individuals.

Some workers may be required to work [shifts](#) or [extended work days](#) which can have health effects.

Are there any long-term health effects of being a shipper/receiver?

According to the International Labour Office (ILO), health effects can include:

- risk of work-related musculoskeletal diseases (often related to overuse or lifting).
- possibility of exposure to chemicals or materials stored or handled at the warehouse. These effects will vary greatly depending on the substance, and how it was stored or handled.

Source: Lund, J. Warehousing. In Encyclopaedia of Occupational Health and Safety. 4th edition. Geneva: International Labour Office, 1998. Pages 102.61 to 102.67

What are some preventative measures that can be taken?

- Use correct procedures for both manual materials handling (lifting), and materials handling (using cranes, hoists, etc.).
- Be aware of awkward body positions and avoid where possible. If a job requires work in an awkward position (e.g., with hands above shoulder level) or repetition, be sure to take frequent breaks.
- Always use the correct personal protective equipment (PPE) for the task.
- Wear appropriate footwear (for walking/standing, as well as protection from dropped objects).
- Keep all work areas clear of clutter and equipment.
- Know how to handle and store chemicals and materials safely.
- Always make sure that the tools and the safety features of tools and equipment are in good working order before using.

- Follow a recommended shift work pattern, and be aware of the hazards associated with shift work.
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What are some general safe work practices to know?

Shippers and receivers will need to know:

- [material handling procedures](#)
- [manual material handling](#) (lifting) techniques
- proper selection, use, maintenance and storage of [PPE](#), where appropriate
- selection of [footwear](#)
- proper procedures for working at heights (e.g., on [platforms/scaffolding](#) or [ladders](#))
- proper techniques to work safely with various types of equipment including:
 - [hand tools](#) (includes hand saws, hammers, screwdrivers, etc.)
 - [powered hand tools](#) (includes pneumatic nailing guns, power-actuated tools, circular saws, etc.)
- information about [shiftwork](#)

All workers should:

- follow company safety rules
 - know about [WHMIS](#) and [SDSs](#)
 - know your hazard [reporting procedures](#), and
 - follow good [housekeeping procedures](#)
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Where can I get more information?

Because of the wide variety of tasks and materials a shipper/receiver may do or work with, all situations cannot be covered in this document.

NOTE: If you have health concerns, ask your doctor or medical professional for advice.

If you have any questions or concerns about your specific workplace, you can ask one or more of the following for help:

- your health and safety committee or representative
- your union

- your safety department
- your supervisor or manager
- check with your local library
- your local [government department responsible for health and safety](#).

General information is available in OSH Answers or through the CCOHS person-to-person [Inquiries Service](#).

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