

# Loading Dock Safety

## REFERENCE GUIDE

November 2023

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Loading docks support campus operations by allowing equipment, materials, and supplies to be moved in and out of buildings with minimal inconvenience to occupants. Because of the activities that occur routinely at docks, it is important that the campus community is aware of potential hazards in these areas. For instance, most of the docks on campus are elevated and use built-in leveling systems that bridge the gap between the dock edge and the delivery vehicle to assist with loading and prevent trips and falls. When trucks are not present at the dock, dock equipment and pedestrians can fall off the dock edge if left unprotected. Guardrails or similar protective devices are to be used at loading dock edges over 30 inches high to prevent fall injuries. Please use this reference guide to increase your level of safety when using loading docks on campus.

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### Definitions

**Guardrail:** A vertical barrier placed along the open edges of a platform or elevated area to prevent persons from potential falls. Barriers must withstand 20 pounds per linear foot applied horizontally or vertically downward at the top rail.

**Loading Dock:** An elevated or non-elevated area at the side of a building where goods are loaded and unloaded from vehicles.

**Loading Dock Levelers:** A vertically adjustable hinged metal ramp that provides a smooth transition for a lift truck to move between the truck bed and the loading dock surface. The vertical adjustment of the dock leveler allows it to accommodate varying truck bed heights.

**Vehicle Restraint System:** A device used to prevent accidental vehicle movement during the loading/unloading process.

**Wheel Chocks:** Wedges of sturdy material placed closely against a vehicle's wheels to prevent accidental movement after it is parked.

### Common Dock Hazards

- Collisions with forklifts and other moving equipment
- Falling off unprotected dock edges
- Slipping on wet/oily surfaces
- Tripping over stationary items/uneven surfaces
- Injuries caused by improper lifting and carrying
- Guardrails (or other protective devices) not replaced/secured at dock edges
- Dock lighting is not adequate for loading activities
- Injuries resulting from not using a stairway to access the elevated dock

Loading Dock



Loading Dock Leveler in Use



## Safety Procedures for Loading and Unloading of Vehicles at Docks

- Conduct a safety inspection of the area before you operate a forklift or lift truck.
- If operating a forklift or lift truck, all operators must be appropriately trained and authorized to operate the equipment.
- If accessing a vehicle parked at the dock with a forklift or lift truck, confirm that the vehicle's wheels are correctly chocked, and that the vehicle is appropriately secured to the dock with a restraint system before loading/unloading.

Vehicle Wheel Chock



Vehicle Restraint System



- Use available stairways to access elevated dock surfaces. Do not climb up or down from an elevated dock.
- When appropriate (e.g., when operating a forklift or lift truck), use dock leveling plates to provide a stable surface to move materials and prevent falls. Ensure dock plates are level with the dock surface when loading is complete.
- When removing guardrails (or other protective devices) prior to loading/unloading, place them in areas where they are not a trip/fall hazard. Replace guardrails (or other protective devices) after loading/unloading operations have been completed.

- Stay aware of vehicles, materials, and pedestrians in the area.
- Use gloves and other personal protective equipment when needed.
- If movable gate arms are being used at the dock, raise them during the loading/unloading and lower them when loading/unloading is complete.
- Obtain permission from the building manager before loading/unloading the vehicle after hours.
- Reschedule loading activity and notify the building manager if an unsafe condition is observed at a loading dock.

## Safety Practices at Loading Docks

- Do not empty trash containers/bags into the trash dumpster from the **elevated** dock unless a protective barrier is in place. Empty trash containers at ground level if protective barriers are not in place.

Trash Dumpster Without Railing



Trash Dumpster with Railing



- Check the dock surface for spills, uneven edges, and stored items that could cause injury.
- Be aware of dock edges at all times. Avoid walking/standing by unguarded dock edges.
- Report potential hazards to a supervisor as soon as possible.
- Wear the appropriate footwear (e.g., slip-resistant soles, safety-toe protection) and other personal protective equipment while working in dock areas.
- Refrain from using docks to enter/exit buildings. Campus docks are designed for loading/unloading activities only.
- Use docks during daytime hours and avoid using docks with limited lighting at night to prevent injuries.
- Be courteous to equipment operators, signal them when you are nearby, and try not to interrupt their work tasks.
- Use stairways when accessing elevated dock areas to avoid injury. Choose an alternative route if stairways are not available.
- After opening gates, removing chains, railing or other protective devices along dock edges, be sure to close gates/replace equipment when your work task is completed to ensure the safety of others.

Gate Arms Closed After Use



Chains / Railing Replaced After Use



## References

- Cal/OSHA, Title 8, §3207. Definitions.
- Cal/OSHA, Title 8, §3209. Standard Guardrails.
- Cal/OSHA, Title 8, §3210(a). Guardrails at Elevated Locations.

Contact EHS at (949) 824-6200 or [safety@uci.edu](mailto:safety@uci.edu) for more information and questions.