

Safe Baggage Handling at Cruise Ship Terminals

Porters and baggage handlers (longshoremen) working in cruise ship terminals experience a high rate of occupational injuries. These workers lift and carry heavy objects, such as baggage and supplies, and often work in environments that force them to bend, kneel, crouch, or crawl in awkward positions. This fact sheet highlights safety measures workers and employers should take to prevent strains, sprains, and back injuries.

To prevent injuries on the job, use safe lifting and loading techniques; ensure equipment is in good working order, including all safety features; and conduct pre-shift safety talks with workers prior to the start of baggage-related operations. During pre-shift safety talks, include training on safe lifting techniques, equipment usage, and the safety procedures in place.

Since passengers and baggage handlers often share transportation routes, develop and enforce traffic patterns designed to separate passengers from baggage and supply-handling areas. Clearly mark these areas and keep them free of obstructions. Signage, stanchions, and barricades can be used to ensure the safety of all personnel.

Safe Lifting and Loading Techniques

When loading or unloading baggage, many of the same safety precautions apply. Employers should train workers to use safe lifting techniques. For example, administrative controls, such as the use of color-coded tags for sorting bags, can also be used to indicate their weight to workers. Other recommended best practices for the safe lifting/movement of baggage include:

- Warm up muscles prior to starting each shift by doing gentle range of motion movements similar to those used during the task.
- Never assume the weight of an object solely based on size. Check for tags that indicate any heavy or overweight baggage, or try out the load first by pushing it or lifting a corner. If it is too heavy, get help.
- Do not lift awkward-shaped baggage. Instead, use a partner or mechanical means to assist.
- Have a cart or cage positioned nearby to minimize the lifting range of motion.



Photo: Tim Podue, International Longshore & Warehouse Union

Signs, such as the one shown above, can help alert workers to specific dangers.

- Keep bags close and in the center of your body.
- Lift slowly and steadily, using your legs, not your back.
- Turn with your feet instead of twisting your waist.
- Avoid stacking baggage above shoulder height.
- Find alternate routes when encountering slippery or uneven surfaces.

Safe Use of Equipment

During the loading and unloading of passenger baggage, baggage cages and mechanical equipment are used to transfer a large quantity at one time. While the use of such equipment helps minimize heavy lifting by workers and increases the efficiency of the process, there are still potential hazards. Only those workers determined competent by reason of training or experience to operate particular powered cargo handling equipment or vehicle may do so.

Employers should train all baggage workers of all potential hazards. During the loading/off-loading of baggage, observe the following precautions and procedures:

- Use only equipment that is in good working condition.
- Operate mechanical equipment as it was intended (e.g., push, do not pull).
- Use restraining devices on baggage cages when available.
- Avoid stacking bags too high, in order to maintain stability and a clear line of sight over the cart.
- Keep feet clear of the pallet jack and the load.
- Exercise additional caution when using pallet jacks to move baggage cages aboard the ship due to limited work space.
- Ask for help — never strain to move a heavy cart.
- Follow established traffic patterns and watch for others in the work area.
- Take extra precautions when working near wet surfaces or in dark areas. Provide workers with portable lighting when necessary.
- Maintain regular communication with designated personnel handling baggage aboard the vessel.



Photo above shows use of compact electric pallet jack aboard a ship.

Photo: Tim Podue, International Longshore & Warehouse Union



Forkliftcages used to transfer baggage around cruise ship terminals.

Photo: Tim Podue, International Longshore & Warehouse Union

Additional Safety Considerations

In some cases, workers must wear personal flotation devices (PFDs) when baggage is being handled through side ports of a vessel and other locations when the hazard of falling into the water

is present. For information on when PFDs and other personal protective equipment are required, see [29 CFR 1917.93 through 1917.95](#), and [1918.103 through 1918.105](#).

Other Resources

- OSHA's Baggage Handling eTool www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/baggagehandling
- National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) Ergonomic Guidelines for Manual Material Handling www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2007-131/pdfs/2007-131.pdf
- OSHA Grant Materials Fact Sheet on Controlling Ergonomic Hazards www.osha.gov/dte/grant_materials/fy11/sh-22240-11/ErgoHazards.pdf

Workers' Rights

Workers have the right to:

- Working conditions that do not pose a risk of serious harm.
- Receive information and training (in a language and vocabulary the worker understands) about workplace hazards, methods to prevent them, and the OSHA standards that apply to their workplace.
- Review records of work-related injuries and illnesses.
- File a complaint asking OSHA to inspect their workplace if they believe there is a serious hazard or that their employer is not following OSHA's rules. OSHA will keep all identities confidential.
- Exercise their rights under the law without retaliation, including reporting an injury or raising health and safety concerns with their employer or OSHA. If a worker has been retaliated against for using their rights, they must file a complaint with OSHA as soon as possible, but no later than 30 days.

For additional information, see [OSHA's Workers page](#).

How to Contact OSHA

Under the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970, employers are responsible for providing safe and healthful workplaces for their employees. OSHA's role is to ensure these conditions for America's working men and women by setting and enforcing standards, and providing training, education and assistance. For more information, visit www.osha.gov or call OSHA at 1-800-321-OSHA (6742), TTY 1-877-889-5627.



U.S. Department of Labor



This is one in a series of informational fact sheets highlighting OSHA programs, policies or standards. It does not impose any new compliance requirements. For a comprehensive list of compliance requirements of OSHA standards or regulations, refer to Title 29 of the Code of Federal Regulations. This information will be made available to sensory-impaired individuals upon request. The voice phone is (202) 693-1999; teletypewriter (TTY) number: 1-877-889-5627.

