

Workplace Health and Safety Queensland

Safety for builders' supplies wholesalers

Queensland wholesalers perform a wide variety of work and hold a unique position in the supply chain.

Injury rates

Even though the number of injuries and employees in Queensland's wholesale industry varies from year to year, the injury rate is increasing.

The table below shows the number of workers in the builders' supplies wholesaling sub-sector in Queensland.

Source: Queensland Employee Injury Database

Year	04-05	05-06	06-07	07-08	08-09
Workers	9200	6400	9900	8900	8200
Claims	759	736	980	1193	956

In 2004-05 the injury rate (i.e. number of injuries per 1000 workers) was 82.5. By 2008-09, the injury rate had increased to 119.7.

Common injury types

The most common injury type in the builders' supplies wholesaling sub-sector is musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), caused by performing high risk manual tasks.

These injuries are commonly called sprains and strains and include such injuries as lower back strain, carpal tunnel syndrome, or rotator cuff strain.

Sprains and strains mostly occur in this sub-sector when someone is lifting, carrying or putting down objects, such as stock. The lower back and shoulders most commonly suffer these types of injuries.

Timber is the most common agency of injury for builders' supplies wholesalers – that is, the injury occurred when people were handling, carrying or putting down timber.

Over the last few years handling timber accounted for almost one in five of the MSD claims in the sub-sector. This trend has also increased the most of all injury patterns over the period.

Highlights

- The injury rate in builders' supplies wholesaling is increasing.
- Sprains and strains are the most common injuries, often from moving stock, especially timber.
- Nail guns, metal fragments and knives and strapping are the main causes of traumatic injuries.
- Labourers, storepersons and drivers have the most injury claims.

After MSDs, the most common injury pattern for wholesalers of timber is wounds from being hit by nails from nail guns, particularly punctures and cuts to the hands and fingers.

For hardware and general builders' supplies wholesalers the most common injury pattern is from being hit, mostly in the eye, by metal fragments when cutting, drilling or grinding.

All builders' supplies wholesalers are commonly reporting injuries from unpacking stock – both from the knives used to open boxes or cut strapping, and from the wire rope or strapping used to bundle stock.

Commonly injured workers

By far the most commonly injured workers are labourers and related workers. This category includes general labourers and also usually includes labour hire workers.

The next most common occupations for injury claims are storepersons, heavy truck drivers, timberyard labourers and delivery drivers. Forklift drivers are another common occupation for injury claims in both timber and general builders' supplies wholesalers.

Key issues identified by industry

Businesses and industry associations have identified manual tasks as a high risk for the industry, particularly given the often unwieldy nature of products sold.

Cuts frequently come from opening boxes and strapping, and also from sharp edges on products. Crush injuries are often from unsecured product falling onto people during delivery and while in storage areas.

Managing traffic flow for safety and efficiency was identified as an issue, particularly managing the risks that come from using forklifts.

Other issues

Business and industry associations also highlighted other issues that may contribute to risks.

Managing the safety of short-term labour hire workers is a concern for host employers, particularly the ongoing need for induction and training. The health and safety of wholesalers can also be affected by the practices or requirements of other businesses in the supply chain. Associations have also reported that the effects of fatigue may be a concern for some workers.

Tips for managing risks

The best way to manage risk is to get rid of the harm or prevent the risk entirely. If that isn't possible, try other options such as using mechanical lifting aids, installing barriers to separate people from the risk, and redesigning the workplace or practices. Some controls that businesses use include:

Manual tasks

- Use forklifts, trolleys and mechanical lifting aids, such as scissor lifts and vacuum lifts.
- Design or redesign the work area to reduce manual task risks, for instance using load-specific shelving that is placed at an optimum height.

Cuts and splinters

- Use materials handling equipment to limit manual handling.
- Use safer equipment for opening packaging, such as recessed or retracting safety knives.
- Use personal protective equipment such as gloves and wrist guards.

Crush injuries

- Restrain goods during transport and storage, for instance clips to keep packs of timber in place.
- Ensure that appropriate plant and equipment guarding is in place.

Traffic management and forklifts

- Install physical barriers to prevent vehicle (particularly forklift) and pedestrian interaction, such as bollards and railings.
- Clearly mark walkways and use visual alerts, for instance flashing lights on forklifts or where pedestrians are working.

More information is available from www.worksafe.qld.gov.au or by calling the WHS Infoline on 1300 369 915.

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