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SAFETY

Seeing Around Corners: Preventing Blind Spot Accidents

The ramifications of a loading dock or workplace collision are great: physical injury, death, potential litigation, loss of productivity and even higher insurance rates are possible consequences of employees not having greater visibility in the workplace.

John Mangiameli | Oct 12, 2017

Safety often is compromised in facilities when employees operating heavy equipment like forklifts encounter stock pickers or others on foot at loading docks, intersections or blind spots. Even a near miss or a "close call" can be serious. Many of the large fulfillment warehouses have "runners" who blindly run into each other, while on foot at rack intersections, causing severe injury.

"If someone is carrying product, chemicals or items involved in production, a near miss can cause them to fall or drop a what they are holding, which can lead to all kinds of issues," says David Johnson, merchandising manager at Northern Safety Co., a supplier of industrial safety equipment.

While some safety precautions already exist in such environments, none are foolproof. For example, for forklifts and other vehicles that "beep" loudly when in reverse, the noise inside and outside a busy facility often can drown out such warnings. Over time, employees incorporate those warnings into the background noise of the facility and don't heed them.

"When vehicle operators drive in reverse, they are often looking the opposite way that they are traveling," Johnson says. "The noise level at production plants can also distract workers. That's when the risk of an industrial accident multiplies – when employees cannot adequately see or hear vehicles or foot traffic at intersections and other high-risk areas."

Seeing Around Corners

Though many types of safety equipment exist, one of the most effective and economical approaches to prevent collisions is the use of industrial safety mirrors and domes that are shatter-resistant, weatherproof and customized to fit the unique needs of your facility.

However, the selection of convex mirrors can be far from a straightforward process. Often, one-size-fits all, standard catalog units will not suffice. The types of vehicles used in the space, pedestrians, traffic flow factors and how aisles intersect can all play a role in determining which mirrors and domes best serve the organizations's workplace safety needs. Other issues that may need to be addressed include how easily the mirror mounts to a specific surface, if severe weather conditions are present or if the mirror is shatter-resistant.

In these situations, special options or customization of mirrors may be required to help employees and vehicle operators optimally "see around corners" to improve safety at active aisle intersections and loading docks.

As a solution, industrial safety mirrors and domes provide a vital secondary level of visual protection at locations where the collision risk is greatest. To accommodate a range of needs, many options are available, including not only a wide variety of mirror and dome sizes, shapes and angles of visibility, but also shatter-resistant acrylic and polycarbonate materials and all-weather coatings for indoor or outdoor use, as well as high-visibility safety markings designed to attract attention.

For instance, in outdoor loading dock areas, a standard mirror tends to blend into the background when a forklift exits a trailer. In such cases, convex mirrors that offer 160-degree viewing with high-visibility safety borders that draw the eye to the mirror significantly can reduce the risk of accidents.

This provides additional safety at corner and "T" intersections outdoors. Strategically positioning these mirrors at the ends of warehouse aisles and outside corners also can help to prevent accidents at blind spots in indoor spaces as well.

Compared to conventional glass mirrors, acrylic mirrors can be more durable, lightweight and fade-proof. Second surface printing also protects the safety border from scratching or discoloring. Mirrored domes also have a high visibility safety border option as well.

Meeting Workplace Needs

Indoors, mirrored domes in a variety of configurations can provide even greater visibility around corners. For instance, 90-degree quarter domes provide viewing for corner intersections, 180-degree mirrored half domes allow excellent viewing at T-intersections and 360-degree mirrored domes enable enhanced viewing at four-way or circular intersections.

To eliminate blind spots around machinery and in areas with low ceilings, mirrors with a "roundtangular" shape can allow a wide viewing angle with a minimal vertical mirror height, allowing the mirror to be placed as high as possible on the wall.

Specialized convex or flat mirrors with handles and wheels also can promote safety by allowing employees to easily inspect under cars, trucks and heavy equipment without having to climb under the vehicles or elevate them. Options include a LED flashlight for better viewing, and a heavy-duty articulated wheel carriage that enables tilting the mirror without the wheels leaving the surface.

Other models are available without wheels to allow a quick search of high areas – such as racks or shelves – without having to climb a ladder.

To promote plant safety, slogans can be printed on a mirror's surface such as "Meet the person most responsible for your safety" as well as company information or logos. Printing is an option for convex, dome and flat mirrors.

Although most of the situations that pose a danger to worker safety usually can be solved with an off-the-shelf solution, customization of the mirror, dome or mounting hardware may be required for some situations, and companies will work with you to determine the best options for your facility and needs.

While industrial safety mangers typically gauge the value of a product by the number of accidents, incidents or even near misses they record, what this tracking does not account for is the amount of traffic that is kept safe each day by industrial mirrors and domes.

"The true value of such mirrors is how economically they can help to prevent accidents and enhance production uptime," Johnson concludes. EHS

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