

Pallets

Relevant Legislation

The use of work equipment such as pallets is covered by **The Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998** (PUWER). This includes a requirement for work equipment to be 'constructed or adapted as to be suitable for the purpose for which it is used or provided', as well as meeting maintenance and inspection requirements.

Your risk assessment, required by **The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999**, should cover the hazards and risks from using and stacking pallets in the workplace. It should include not only the risks to employees but also any others at risk, for example members of the public or contractors visiting the workplace.

Health and Safety Executive Guidance

There are numerous points for consideration regarding the use of pallets. Detailed information can be obtained from the Health and Safety Executive's guidance note **PM 15 Pallet safety**. This guidance covers general-purpose flat pallets, which can be manufactured from a variety of materials. Pallets are used widely throughout industry, and this practical advice is for two audiences:

- Those who have responsibilities for buying and using pallets as a base for assembling, storing, handling and transporting goods and loads.
- Those who have responsibilities for the design and manufacture of pallets.

It tells buyers what they should ask designers and manufacturers to consider when designing a pallet. It also recommends how both new and used pallets should be used and inspected.

Pallet Accidents

Pallets are heavy so when incidents occur, they tend to be serious. Falling pallets have caused a number of fatalities, but the risks posed by falling pallets are often not fully appreciated. Most incidents could be prevented by developing and following safe working practices.

Incidents directly attributable to pallets are usually caused by:

- Poor design, construction or repair.
- Using inferior materials.
- Unsafe stacking resulting in falling stacks or pallets.
- Continuing to use a damaged pallet.
- Bad handling techniques.
- Pallets being used in an unsuitable environment.
- Handling problems caused by mixing smaller Europallets with larger UK pallets in racking systems. The smaller pallet may fall from the rack beams or be displaced by the larger pallet.
- Using a pallet which is unsuitable for a particular load, handling or storage method, e.g. pallets taken at random from a 'mixed bag' of used pallets for which the original specification is not known.

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Pallet Use and Maintenance

Pallets should be examined for damage by the user on delivery. Damaged pallets should be marked accordingly, isolated and withdrawn for repair or disposal. Many pallets in the market belong to pallet pools and are marked with the trademark of the pallet owner or pallet organisation responsible for controlling their quality.

All pallets should be inspected every time they are used to ensure they are in a safe condition and fit for their intended purpose.

Pallet Repair

Such pallets needing repair should, in the first instance, be returned to the pallet owner or to the trademark owner's authorised representative. In the case where it is not possible to determine ownership or trademark responsibility, you can refer to BS EN ISO 18613 for general guidance.⁸

In summary, the headline points that employers must consider are:

- Suitability
- Pallet design considerations
- Pallet loads
- Pallet environment
- Pallet movement
- Stacking loaded pallets
- Pallet management planning

Damaged pallets should be taken out of service as soon as the damage takes place or is seen. Where the pallet is laden there will need to be a system in place for the goods to be safely transferred to a serviceable pallet.

UKMHA Further Guidance

Also see UKMHA Fact Sheet 9 for further information.

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The information in this Fact Sheet has been assembled and interpreted to give truck owners and users basic guidance on frequently asked questions. Further important information will be given in the quoted reference documents. Responsibility for meeting the safety obligations discussed rests with the employer, and the UKMHA will not accept liability for any problem arising as a result of the content of this document. Technical Bulletins, containing more detailed information and updated as appropriate, are made available free to members of the **UKMHA SAFE USER GROUP**.

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