

John Meale, managing director of leading loading/unloading equipment specialist Thorworld Industries Ltd explains how a positive commitment to safety in and around the loading bay can help firms save money and provide long-term peace of mind.

While the Government has recently initiated a Red Tape Challenge seeking views on health and safety legislation, market-leading loading and unloading equipment specialist Thorworld Industries has issued a reminder that it is in the interest of all businesses not to wait for official guidance and take a proactive approach to protect its own workers and resources.

Thorworld – an accredited SAFEcontractor member – is maintaining its own safety initiative, focusing on the vehicle loading and unloading area. Potentially this is one of the most hazardous areas in any company, warehouse or distribution centre. Yet despite the existence of an extensive range of safety equipment on the market to protect against accidents, the company continues to see examples of poor practice.

"It astonishes me to see businesses operating without a robust loading and unloading area safety strategy," says Thorworld managing director John Meale. "Sometimes, a firm will discover the limitations of their procedures the hard way, after somebody has already been injured. For others, their loading and unloading areas are – as the saying goes – ‘an accident waiting to happen.’"

Thorworld points out that the threat of legal comeback is not the only aspect of a sound health and safety policy. Aside from the ethical ‘duty of care’ considerations an employer owes to its personnel, there are strong economic imperatives for investing in safety equipment. Some of the costs associated with an accident can be measured immediately in terms of damage and downtime, but longer-term implications – such as higher insurance premiums or the threat of legal action – aren’t always obvious.

It is for these reasons that Thorworld is highlighting how simple precautions can be achieved

using cost-effective safety aids.

"As soon as a loading dock door is opened, and a trailer pushed towards the dock, the scope for accidents increases exponentially," confirms John Meale. For this reason, Thorworld's Dockprotecta® range of loading bay safety equipment includes dock & vehicle bumpers (including Thorworld's patented sliding nylon dock bumpers), wheel chocks safety bollards, wheel guides & alignment curbs, vehicle restraints, signs & mirrors, trailer safety locks & supports, speed ramps, column/racking protectors and dock & traffic lights.

Equally important, vehicle movement must be controlled and, where possible, neutralised entirely, in order to prevent lift tucks and personnel falling off the back of trailers, or becoming trapped or crushed. Thorworld provides a wide range of products to prevent vehicle creep. The simplest and perhaps most affordable solutions are to be found in its range of Chock-it® wheel chocks - which are positioned in front of the wheels to stop movement.

Another method of preventing unintentional pull-aways is via a trailer safety lock which is fitted to a parked trailer once the air hose has been disconnected; this then prevents the driver connecting the trailer and driving away. And for the ultimate in vehicle and personnel safety, Thorworld offers the vehicle wheel lock, which not only prevents drive-away accidents during loading and unloading but also reduces the possibility of vehicle theft.

A number of these safety solutions can be specified with sensors that warn of any unanticipated motion and which can be integrated to other devices in the loading bay such as traffic lights. "As technology is developing, integrated electronic systems are becoming an increasingly popular means of co-ordinating safety procedures across multiple pieces of equipment," explains John Meale.

Another hazard – and possibly one of the most dangerous – is when a vehicle trailer, without its cab, tips forward. This can happen if the standard landing legs fail and when the vehicle has been loaded incorrectly, or when empty it becomes unbalanced. Preventing this is easy thanks to the Thorworld trailer safety support.

Nor is health and safety limited to dramatic one-off incidents. The potential exists for extreme operating temperatures to have long-term adverse effects on personnel – and potentially on products, if for example the warehouse is handling perishable goods. Items such as inflatable dock seals help to maintain a consistent, safe temperature. Similarly, dock bumpers prevent sustained damage to both vehicles and the building infrastructure, avoiding hidden long-term safety risks.

Investing in equipment is not in itself enough to guarantee a safe working environment. Numerous standards and directives applicable to good practice in installation and operation must be adhered to. And there's no better safety device than knowledge; a vital aspect of health and safety is to ensure that employees receive appropriate training to ensure they know what they are doing. Thorworld offers a range of training programmes to help customers master the safe and efficient handling of its loading bay equipment.

Thorworld advises that – before any investment is made – a company should perform a health and safety audit to identify potential hazards in their specific loading and unloading or warehouse area. The company advises that specifiers, architects and end-users should read a new publication by FEM (The European Materials Handling Federation) which offers invaluable advice on how to control safety issues. Titled 'Guidance On Safety On / Around A Vehicle Loading Area,' the comprehensive guide is available online at <http://tinyurl.com/FEM-loading-safety> under 'Free Technical Documents' and will be periodically updated as standards and directives change, and as any new technologies and products are launched.

Similarly Thorworld undertakes detailed discussions with customers about the availability and merits of different loading bay equipment, accessories and safety aids, which should also prove valuable in providing extra peace of mind.

"With a little common sense, backed by expert guidance and smart investment in equipment and training, loading and unloading area safety can be improved to the point where accidents will be waiting a long time before they happen," concludes John Meale.

Thorworld is celebrating its 30th anniversary in 2011 and was established by John Meale, a well known and respected figure in the materials handling industry. John is a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Logistics & Transport (FCILT), a member of the Institution of Engineering & Technology (IET), past President of the Association of Loading & Elevating Equipment Manufacturers (ALEM), former President of the British Materials Handling Federation (BMHF), and is the current President of the European Materials Handling Federation (FEM), as well as heading up its Elevating & Loading Equipment Product Group.

BSI registered with ISO 9002 accreditation since 1992, Thorworld was one of the first companies in its sector to achieve the latest ISO 9001 (2008) international quality management standard and now has an extensive list of customers across a wide range of industries and business types, including building, construction, distribution, logistics, transport, warehousing, retail, food, drink, manufacturing, industry, waste management & recycling and the service sector.

Thorworld provides a one-stop , single source for the UK's widest range of high quality, standard and bespoke, loading bay & materials handling equipment, safety aids and accessories.

For more information about Thorworld's market-leading loading/unloading equipment, and to obtain a copy of their latest Product Range Catalogue, contact Thorworld industries Ltd, Station Lane Industrial Estate, Old Whittington, Chesterfield, Derbyshire, S41 9QX. Tel: 01246 260981. Fax: 01246 260493. Email: info@thorworld.co.uk Web: www.thorworld.co.uk