

Picking up the pieces

How to recover from a rack collapse

BY TONY MULHOLLAND – RACK NET-WORKS ON AUGUST 24, 2010

CRASHHH!

“What was that?” someone asks. “It sounded like it came from the warehouse!” cries another.

When you hear something like that, myriad chilling thoughts swirl through your brain as you race toward the source of the crash site. Bursting through the door, your worst fears are confirmed: a rack has collapsed. What next?

Perhaps contrary to what some may think, rack collapses are not usually a result of overloading or under-designed racking. Typically, they occur under circumstances where damaged and/or modified racking is subjected to a trigger or impact force from a lift truck driving error. The cause is important—and must be dealt with later—but in the immediate aftermath, your team should have other priorities.

First, you should trigger your company’s emergency response procedures, with firm adherence to the corporate health and safety policies. Take stock of the situation. Call emergency response teams immediately if an employee has been hurt.

If everyone is fine, it’s time to begin recovery. Take some time to properly assess the damages so that you can develop and initiate a safe cleanup plan.

Where justified, you should notify insurance companies of the incident, as they will want to assign a person to the claim. They may direct you to certain forensic investigation, emergency response and demolition services. But it’s worth noting that not every collapse involves injury or losses that justify an insurance claim. You may want to assemble your own team to or hire a rack installation company to clean up the debris, unload pallets and dismantle the damaged rack. Depending on the commodity, you may need to call in specialists to remove hazardous materials.

If there has not been an injury, most companies handle the matter internally without involving labour inspectors. But that doesn’t mean you don’t have to do anything; you must make sure the remaining racks are compliant with structural design standards (CSA standard A344) and, importantly, that the cause of the collapse is fully understood. A lingering or inadequate response to a rack collapse will inevitably conjure concern from employees about safety.

So how do you identify the direct cause of a collapse? Interviewing those working in the area of the collapse does not always tell the full story, as a fear of repercussions might cause people to present a modified version of the truth. This is when an engineer’s eye can help. An engineer can also identify potential problems in racking adjacent to the collapse and to the overall structure as well.