

LIFTING STANDARDS

The Health and Safety Executive decided against setting a maximum limit for single pallet tail-lift deliveries. So how heavy is too heavy, and how can pallets weighing over one tonne be managed safely? Chris Tindall reports

The death of a delivery driver in 2016 while unloading a pallet of goods weighing more than a tonne prompted scrutiny of safe working practices in the sector. But earlier this year the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) decided against setting a maximum pallet weight for tail-lift deliveries, instead allowing the industry to develop guidance for palletised deliveries.

The HSE says its research found that "setting a pallet weight limit would not be sensible". An HSE spokeswoman explains: "There are a number of factors which can significantly increase the force required to move a loaded pallet, of which weight is just one. Depending on these other factors, very light pallets could require excessive force to move them, and very heavy pallets could be moved safely and easily. Any limit would need to cover the wide range of possible conditions and would be extremely low compared to current pallet weights used. That would have the effect of preventing a large proportion of potentially safe [manual] pallet movement and would severely affect the logistics industry, with little or no safety benefit."

The spokeswoman adds that it is "clearly" the responsibility of those in control of transport operations to ensure the suitable assessment and

management of health and safety risks to their staff and others.

To that end, HSE and an industry working group are collaborating to develop new guidance which will play a role here. She adds: "The customer-facing driver should, in our view, be supported by this." Such assessments, she continues, might involve seeking appropriate information ahead of time, and making suitable provision for a load transport prior to dispatching a driver to collect. They might also include provision of suitable driver training and having clear policies and procedures, so drivers are competent to undertake a dynamic assessment if the situation is different to that agreed, and empowered to refuse collection on the basis of their assessment.

Not everyone is happy with the HSE's decision. Its recommendation for risk assessments has led to accusations that



the HSE had done nothing but place the burden of responsibility directly on to drivers. Malcolm Dodds, head of technical services at the RHA, who also sits on the working group, describes the HSE's decision as "disappointing". He says many operators and pallet networks would have preferred that a limit was set.

The guidance document will update an existing document produced by the IRTE, 'Preventing Falls and Falling Loads from Tail Lifts', according to John Eastman, chairman of the IRTE's professional sector council. In the





TAIL-LIFT RISK ASSESSMENT

HSE's own Risk Assessment of Pulling And Pushing tool (<https://is.gd/osijof>), published in 2016, does not place a maximum weight on push-pull operations using pump trucks: the only load it rates as 'unacceptable' is one that exceeds the rated capacity of the moving equipment. However, it does discourage heavy loads. It rates the relative risk of loads by weight: those ranging from 600-1,000kg are 'medium' risk, those 1,000-1,500kg are rated 'high' risk, and those over 1,500kg are rated 'very high'. (The latter are said to require prompt mitigating action, as they may expose a 'significant proportion' of the working population to risk of injury.) However, load weight is only one of eight factors considered in the risk assessment; others include posture, hand grip, work pattern, travel distance, equipment condition and floor/ground surface. And another HSE document points out: "Pushing and pulling forces will also increase if a ramp or slope is to be negotiated" (<https://is.gd/naqule>; see also editor's comment, p3).

A 400kg pallet is not too bad, but a 900kg pallet on an aluminium platform? There are elements of health and safety involved in that. We are seeing a bit of a change there, with operators using cantilever tail-lifts and a nice big platform using electric-assist pump trucks. That's probably the safe way."

You might be wondering how many pallets are regularly being delivered that weigh more than one tonne. According to Johnson, the average weight is probably around half a tonne. He continues: "So how much of an issue is this? It could be a small percentage, but there's no doubt once you get to 500kg or 600kg deliveries become more difficult, and there's a bigger risk."

To date, only two pallet networks have taken the decision to limit pallet sizes: Fortec and Palletline. The latter introduced a 750kg standard tail-lift delivery limit. But it will also deliver heavier loads; it's just that these are booked as part of its Lift Assist service, which uses trucks bigger than 7.5 tonnes gvw and powered pump trucks.

Graham Leitch, Palletline MD, argues that one reason why other networks have not introduced a limit is because pallet networks sometimes fear health and safety is an extra time and cost burden.

Leitch describes the lack of load limits as 'a missed opportunity', but he also says that limiting standard deliveries to 750kg was not so much about the extra 250kg, but more to do with having the correct equipment and training drivers adequately. He adds: "750kg can be delivered safely in all areas including home deliveries, as long as safe delivery practices are adhered to." [IE](#)

FURTHER INFORMATION

Preventing falls – IRTE guidance:
<https://is.gd/oxihag>

Operators' tips – IRTE guidance:
<https://is.gd/hilima>

How to specify – IRTE guidance:
<https://is.gd/lareju>

meantime, the current 20-page guide, produced by members of a tail-lift users group, offers advice on load and personnel security, with sections on training, checks and management responsibilities (and it does not specify weight limits); see links below.

Dodds adds that some pallet networks didn't need the law to come up with a limit. While some operators are determining the average weight of their pallets and deciding whether there is a need to calculate a similar maximum limit, others have already decided to go down to 750kg. He adds: "A lot of networks have health and safety measures in place anyway to help with deliveries. Guidance is just that: guidance. Pallet networks probably go over and above that now anyway."

Paul Johnson, MD of Transervice Express, a member of business organisation The Pallet Networks, says that he accepts that it would have been too complicated for the HSE to have set a limit. "There are too many

variables," he points out. "One man can move a one-tonne pallet safely, but as soon as one parameter changes, which they clearly do out on the road, then everything changes – and they change quite drastically. It was impossible [for the HSE] to give a weight that we could say what's safe and what isn't."

RISK ASSESSMENT

Johnson says its drivers already perform a risk assessment before each delivery. Although they initially thought it was a pointless activity, their minds have changed: "They see it for what it is now; it empowers them to have some input."

He also says the issue has highlighted the practical constraints on delivering heavy pallets. "The vast majority of 7.5-tonne vehicles are fitted with a one-tonne capacity tail-lift; when you take off the weight of the driver and the pump truck, then you are down to 750kg."

Johnson adds: "The other point is the equipment: the majority of vehicles have tuckaway tail-lifts. Space is limited.