



# Loading dock safety

Securing food products can be just as important as worker safety at the dock door

By Walt Swietlik

The most important aspect of shipping and receiving operations at any food facility is maintaining the integrity of the food being handled.

This boils down to two critical challenges. First is maintaining a clean dock devoid of contaminants. Second is securing the supply chain by mitigating the opportunities for theft or tampering of product.

While training staff in proper food safety protocols is an essential part of the equation, there are several new dock enhancements that can also help.

## Be mindful of FSMA

Aspects of the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) regulations that were recently made into law in the United States, also affect how Canadian food facilities can go about their business.

For starters, Canadian food suppliers will need to adhere to US FDA standards through the Foreign Suppliers Verification Rule. If a US facility cannot verify FDA-sanctioned practices were followed by a Canadian facility, it cannot accept food from it.

FSMA regulations notwithstanding, all Canadian facilities should follow best practices when it comes to cleanliness and security.

## Contaminant-free zone

It isn't always easy to maintain a clean loading dock. One of the best ways to do it is to minimize how many contaminants sneak in around the perimeter of the dock door.

A loading dock seal or shelter creates an environmental barrier between the back end of the semi-trailer and the perimeter of the dock opening. Seals and shelters help keep wind, rain, snow, dust, bugs and other contaminants outside the building.

Some of the newest dock shelters have been specifically designed with the food industry in mind by complementing vertical storing dock levelers, which allow trailer doors to be opened inside the building, as part of a security-enhancing "drive-through" application. Special design features ensure tight sealing against trailer sides, across the full width of the trailer top and at the corners, without

interfering with trailer door movements after the trailer has been locked to the dock.

## The "Gold Standard"

Drive-through dock configurations utilizing vertical-storing levelers are considered the gold standard for maintaining cold chain integrity, environmental control and security. This is because security seals and trailer doors can be opened and closed inside the loading dock, eliminating exposure to the outside environment or thieves.

Vertical levelers also have maintenance advantages. Unlike pit-style levelers, vertical levelers store up and out of the way, making it easier to clean and wash down the floor. Moreover, vertical levelers (when in the stored position) allow the dock door to close directly onto the pit floor for a tight seal.

## Prevent theft and tampering

Vehicle restraints are usually thought of as dock safety equipment. But they also play a role in reducing cargo theft and tampering.

Many of them are now automatic, using a rotating hook to secure a trailer by its rear impact guard (RIG) to the loading dock. However, intermodal containers are often transported on specialized chassis that have an obstructed RIG, making it nearly impossible for the locking mechanism to fully engage with them. As intermodal traffic continues to increase, it is important for facilities to consider advanced restraints that use "shadow" hook technology. It provides an additional pivot point capable of securing trailer chassis with obstructed RIGs.

Some automatic restraints also have a control panel that can be integrated into building management or security systems, providing another level of protection against external tampering. The most advanced restraints will actually re-fire if there is tampering or the trailer attempts to pull away when in the locked position. **MM&D**

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