



**THE SCIENCE OF SAFETY:**  
**THE ABCs OF**  
**INDUSTRIAL BARRIERS**



*Industrial facilities are inherently dangerous and use a variety of barriers to protect people, products and property. In some instances, these barriers may simply separate pedestrian traffic from other internal vehicle traffic. In other facilities, barriers may be employed to keep people away from automated processes and machinery or to protect employees against falls. Barriers may also be used to protect production equipment and/or the building itself from vehicle damage. In all cases, barriers play an important role in helping facilities operate safely and efficiently. An appropriate safety barrier should only be selected after evaluating the application criteria.*



Rite-Hite SpanGuard® Safety Barrier

### TYPES OF BARRIERS

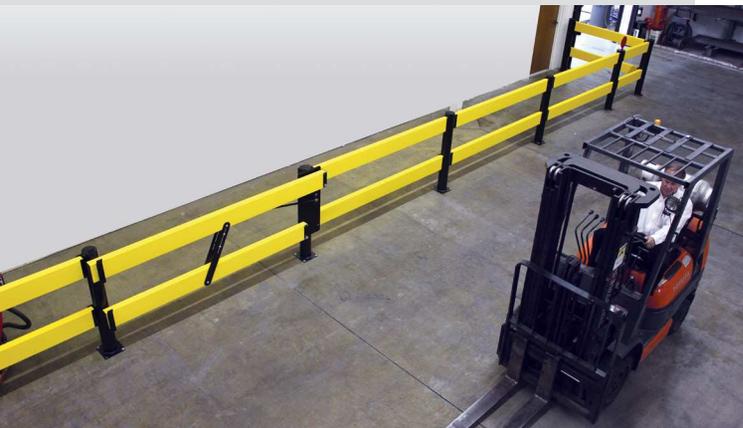
One of the simplest forms of safety measures are yellow lines painted on facility floors to designate pedestrian walkways. Although walkways are common in industrial facilities, they are increasingly being augmented with physical barriers. These barriers add a vertical visual component and create a physical barricade between pedestrians and potential hazards, enhancing safety. According to a report procured by Injury Facts from the National Safety Council, workplace injuries accounted for \$171 billion in 2019. This figure includes wage and productivity losses (\$53.9 billion), medical expenses (\$35.5 billion), administrative expenses (\$59.7 billion), employers' uninsured costs (\$13.3 billion), damage to motor vehicles (\$5 billion), and fire losses (\$3.7 billion).<sup>1</sup>

**More than 8,000 workers miss work and another 75 to 100 lose their life every year in forklift-related incidents across the U.S., according to BLS and NSC.<sup>2,3</sup>**

In heavy equipment operation zones, safety barriers also are frequently used (and for good reason). The barriers used in these applications are designed to absorb the energy of a vehicle impact, protecting plant personnel from potentially life-threatening injuries. Barriers are often applied at the edge of loading docks to protect pedestrians from accidentally stepping off, as well as forklift and other vehicle operators from inadvertently rolling over the edge. Safety barriers can also be applied to protect sensitive equipment or structural elements in a facility, saving repair costs and downtime.



Rite-Hite Dok-Guardian® XL Safety Barrier



# THE SCIENCE OF SAFETY

## HOW BARRIERS WORK: DEFLECTION

Barriers absorb an impact by distributing the impact energy into the materials that comprise the barrier. As the barrier absorbs energy, the materials that comprise it elongate and the barrier deflects. There are two components to barrier deflection. During the impact, the barrier deforms elastically to the point at which energy reaches equilibrium. After most impacts, the barrier returns to its original position. After a severe impact, the barrier may sustain permanent deformation. Before installing a barrier, the user must consider the maximum elastic deflection to ensure adequate protection of personnel and equipment.

## CONSIDERATIONS

There are several considerations facility managers should keep in mind when contemplating safety barrier solutions:

- What are the maximum gross loads and speeds of the material handling equipment expected to impact the barriers?
- Is there sufficient space to allow the barrier to sustain maximum deflection when impacted?
- Is repair or replacement acceptable after a barrier impact creates permanent deformation?
- Do barriers need to be permanently installed or do they need to be accessed on a regular basis?

The impact rating of a barrier is often difficult to define. Although OSHA's regulation 1910.29 (fall protection systems criteria) defines requirements for pedestrian guardrail systems, it does not address barriers designed to stop heavier loads than the 200-lb. standard it uses.

Many manufacturers rate industrial barriers based on their ability to stop an impact of 10,000 lbs. at 4 mph – which has been an industry standard for more than 30 years. However, while this rating provides a meaningful reference for a specific load at a specific speed, it fails to define several key variables:

- How is the barrier's performance affected when the mass of the impacting vehicle increases?
- How is the barrier's performance affected when the impacting vehicle's speed increases?
- How severely was the barrier damaged by the impact? Is replacement necessary?
- How much did the barrier deflect during impact?
- Did it stop the load soon enough to prevent injury or damage?

**Barriers absorb the kinetic energy of an impact by distributing the impact energy into the materials that comprise the barrier.**

# THE SCIENCE OF SAFETY

## BARRIER LOAD AND SPEED TEST (BLAST)

Rite-Hite has developed a test methodology to quantify specific application variables and determine barrier ratings in terms of total kinetic energy absorption, instead of a specific mass and speed.

$$KE = \frac{1}{2}mv^2$$

(where m=mass [weight] and v=velocity)

It is centered on the formula for kinetic energy ( $KE = \frac{1}{2}mv^2$ , where m=mass [weight] and v=velocity), which takes into account both the weight and speed of the impacting object. Expressing the impact rating in terms of energy allows the user to understand the effects of various speeds and weights and determine a more appropriate barrier for their application than would be possible with a single speed and mass rating. To the right is an example of a kinetic energy chart for a Rite-Hite safety barrier.

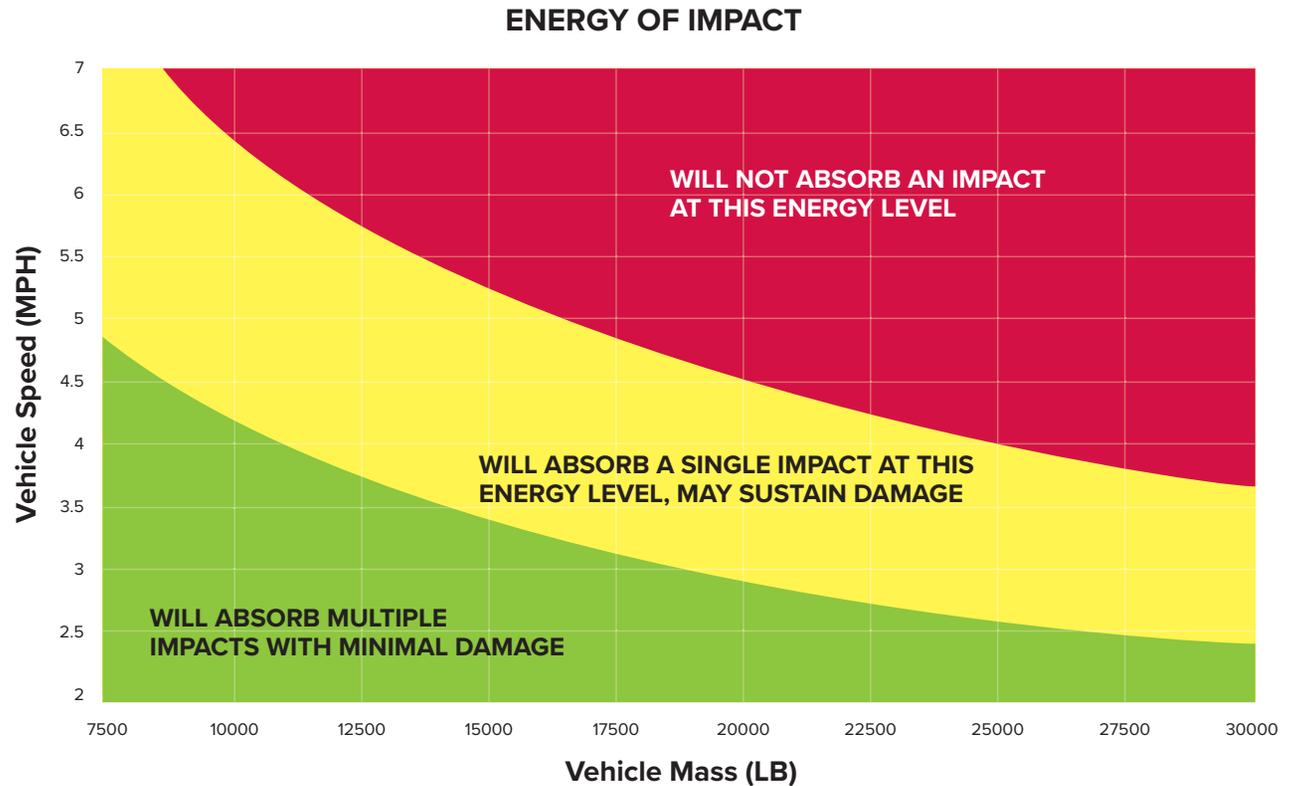
The chart separates the barrier's impact rating into three different areas. The green area shows testing where the barrier wasn't damaged and it is capable of being impacted again. The yellow area shows where the barrier stopped the impact load, but potentially sustained damage and would possibly need repair or replacement. The red area shows where the impact energy exceeds the barrier's maximum rating. In these cases, the impact cannot be fully absorbed and the barrier would not be able to stop the load – indicating that this barrier should not be used for this application.

Kinetic energy ( $KE = \frac{1}{2}mv^2$ ) is proportional to the mass and to the square of the velocity. Because of the squared velocity term ( $v^2$ ), changes in the velocity component have a greater effect on kinetic energy than changes in the mass (weight).

## THE BOTTOM LINE

Installing safety barriers is a cost effective, yet important investment that can help prevent accidents, injuries and damage to products or equipment. Before selecting barriers to invest in, it is important to consider all of

the application requirements. Once these site-specific variables are determined and understood, a user can select the best barrier(s) to meet their safety and protection needs.



<sup>1</sup> <https://injuryfacts.nsc.org/work/costs/work-injury-costs/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bls.gov/iif/oshwc/foi/forklifts-2017.htm>

<sup>3</sup> <https://injuryfacts.nsc.org/work/safety-topics/forklifts/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://injuryfacts.nsc.org/work/safety-topics/falls-lower-level/data-details/>



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8900 North Arbon Drive  
Milwaukee, WI 53223, USA

P 414-355-2600 (800-456-0600)  
F 414-355-9248

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