

# Accident Prevention Worth Its Weight



## The Problem

The safety manager worries about twisted knees, broken ankles, medical bills, recovery periods, new recruits and overtime. He is not a coach, yet he has responsibility for 13 “teams.” He is the safety manager for a company that is the leader in corn and flour tortilla production. With plants around the United States that turn out 12 kinds of tortillas and a variety of tortilla chips, taco shells and snacks.

Every day, thousands of pallets piled high with these products make it out the door on their way to stores, and their success is indisputable. Nevertheless, the company had a serious problem: too many on-the-job injuries.

Pallet loading, which until recently was all done by hand, was one of the main sources of worry. Packed with bags of product, a plastic box called a tote can weigh as much as 40 pounds. Workers stack the containers six layers high on every pallet. Stacking the lower layers of totes required a lot of bending, and at every layer the employees carried full totes around to the other side of the pallet as needed. About 500 of their 4,000 employees load pallets.

An ergonomics consultant was hired to evaluate the problem and recommend a solution.

## The Solution

The consultant and safety manager wanted a lift to keep pallets at a comfortable height. And since the area of the plant in which they were needed was a forklift-free environment, they had to be able to be loaded with a hand pallet jack. They chose a Roll-On Level Loader with a rotating platform from Southworth. The unit lowers all the way to the floor, designed for use with hand pallet trucks. The platform has a capacity of 2,500 pounds. Accessible from all sides, it can be raised/lowered as needed so that each tier of goods can be loaded/unloaded at the same height. Easily turned by hand, the rotating platform means workers can stay on the same side of the unit at all times. An electric motor drives the hydraulic pump that raises the platform when the operator steps on the “up” pedal. There is a “down” pedal for lowering. Descent halts if someone’s foot enters any of the photoelectric “toe-guard” beams around the base of the unit.

“The job of pallet loading is easier now - no question,” the safety manager says. “The products come in on a conveyor belt at waist level, so there is hardly any bending to load the totes. And it is starting to look like I was right about the savings. We’ve seen a decrease in injuries, overtime, and turnover somewhere in the ballpark of 50 percent at those positions.”



Hand Pallet Truck accessible - no forklift needed.



Turntable eliminates walking around the load.



Photo-eye toe sensor protects workers.