



Weekly Safety Meeting

55-Gallon Drum Safety

Industrial drums of any size pose a significant workplace risk for anyone employed in warehousing or material handling occupations. With the average 55-gallon drum weighing between 400-600 lb., manually transporting, decanting, or otherwise handling drums is not only physically demanding, but a potentially dangerous task for any workers.

In the typical workplace, 55-gallon drums are used to store material, to ship it, to dispense it for use, and to store wastes. All these drums must be moved from time to time. Like most things, there's a right way to move a drum and several wrong ways to do it.

Risk Factors

Material handling situations all carry their own risk factors unique to each application, which is why it is important to always handle drums as safely as possible. Taking the time to assess the challenges associated with any job is an essential first step in managing those challenges.

At Least Four Serious Injuries Can Occur if a 55-gallon Drum Is Not Handled Safely:

- Fractures;
- Lacerations;
- Hernias; and
- Back strain.

All these injuries are painful and require a long time to heal. By taking a few precautions before you attempt to move a drum, you can help prevent these serious and painful injuries.

Common Safety Hazards Associated with Industrial Drum Handling Include:

- Heavy drums that can't be handled manually;
- Confined spaces in which workers are unable to use forklifts or other material handling equipment;
- Storage of drums in restricted spaces where worker range of motion is severely restricted;
- Unsafe floor conditions in which slipperiness, clutter, or uneven surfaces can cause trips or falls;
- Half-filled drums that have the potential to shift their weight while in transport; and
- Hazardous materials that can leak out of improperly sealed drums.

The size and shape of industrial drums makes the lightest or even empty drums unwieldy to handle manually.

Moving a high number of industrial drums, even when done safely, can lead to over exertion and the musculoskeletal strain associated with manual handling.

Moving a Drum

Before you move a drum, put on a pair of thick gloves. The gloves will help protect your hands.

Also follow this preliminary checklist:

- Check to see how much room there is to move the drum;
- Plan your route in advance. Don't wait until the drum is in motion;
- Check the route for anything that might cause you to trip or your equipment to slip;
- Check the drum to make sure it isn't warped. This could cause the drum to slip;
- Check the drum for burrs that could cause a laceration;
- Check the drum for liquids that could cause you to lose your grip;
- Check the bung to make sure it is tight enough to prevent leaks; and
- If you are moving the drum using a pallet, make sure the pallet is in good condition.

There are four ways to "break," or initially move, a drum from its standing position. These are pulling, pushing (or combinations of pulling and pushing), the drag/pull method and the push/pull method. Pulling is necessary when drums are grouped closely together. Pushing is used when there is ample room to work. The drag/pull method is used when there are tight spots in the area you are "breaking" the drum. The push/pull method is used when drums are located beside a wall.

To pull the drum, grip the near chime with one hand and the far chime with the other. Brace your foot at an angle across the bottom chime. Your hands and feet should form a straight line. Check the position of your fingers for possible pinch points. Now you are ready to pull back on the drum.

To push the drum, place your hands near the chime at shoulder width. Move your shoulders low and close to the drum. Slowly push forward with your legs until you feel the drum reach its balance point.

When using the drag/pull method, place your hands at the near position at shoulder width. Brace the drum with your foot to prevent it from sliding and shift your weight to the rear foot. Pull and drag it a few inches to the left then to the right.

To use the push/pull method, use one hand to pull the far chime. Use the other hand to push against the wall.

If a drum starts to fall, get away from it as quickly as possible. If the contents spill, follow your worksite's procedures for reporting a spill.

If two people are moving a drum, both people can push the drum, pull the drum, or can push while the other pulls. When rolling the drum, it is safest for one person to roll it.

To Roll a Drum (In This Case to the Left) Follow These Steps:

- Place your left hand high on the chime and your right hand low;
- Use both hands to roll the drum;
- As your right hand reaches the top, quickly switch the left hand to the top position;
- Lift your hands and place them in position. Do not slide our hands because you may cut or burn them;
- Keep your feet separated and do not slide them. Use the side step;
- Turn your body slightly away from the drum, but not too far away; and
- Stay close and ahead of the drum.

When you reach your destination, place the drum in its position using the reverse of the push, pull, drag/pull, or push/pull method.

Most importantly, use material handling equipment whenever possible and get help when you need it!

KEEP SAFETY IN MIND...IT WILL SAVE YOUR BEHIND!!

