

## Case Study – Incident Investigations



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### **Incident**

John, a Driver, arrived on site at a distribution centre to collect loaded pallets for delivery of goods to stores. Upon arriving on site John met Alex, who was loading the pallets with goods and placing them onto the back of a curtain-sided trailer for delivery out to stores.

John was unhappy with the way the goods had been stacked on the pallets and in the back of the trailer. He attempted to raise his concerns several times. John firstly spoke with Alex who told him he'd just been told to get on with the job, get the goods loaded onto the truck as quickly as possible and dispatch them off site as orders were backed up due to two of the loading bays being out of service. Alex also told John he was not sure of the correct procedure for loading goods onto pallets but thought he was doing it as safely as possible. John then attempted to speak with the Transport Manager who was too busy to deal with his concern and instructed John to take the delivery to the stores. John returned to the trailer to carry out his normal checks but was asked to move the trailer, as the distribution warehouse needed to get the next trailer in and loaded. John left the site as instructed to deliver the goods.

About a kilometre away from the distribution warehouse, John drove the truck and trailer unit through a roundabout, and thought he heard something move in the back of the unit but continued towards his destination. John arrived on time to deliver the goods to the store. Upon pulling the curtain side back for the site to begin unloading, a pallet containing heavy items fell out of the trailer unit and narrowly missed John, spoiling the contents onto the ground. Later examination in the rear of the truck and trailer unit revealed that not all the pallets were secured as they should have been, using the internal restraints.

### **Background Findings**

The incident occurred at a national distribution centre for a franchise retailer, on a public highway and at a store. The distribution centre was busy, supplying stock to approximately 100 stores in the North Island. The site had five loading bays and a third-party logistics company carried out the distribution of goods for the company. The incident took place in November when the site was busy with a push to get the stock into stores for Christmas shoppers.

John had been a Driver for 10 years for the third-party logistics company. He had been to this site many times before.

Alex had started work at the distribution warehouse as a Forklift Operator two weeks earlier and was responsible for stacking of warehouse goods onto pallets and loading the pallets onto trailers. Alex was due to complete the site forklift training in a week's time, however he had been put straight on the job to meet the current demand for stock. Alex told management he had driven forklifts in his last job but couldn't find the Forklift OSH Certificate from his previous training when management asked to view it.



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### **The Outcome**

This was a Near Miss incident and while no injuries were sustained, this could have resulted in a fatality and prosecution under the Health & Safety at Work Act for parties involved.

A subsequent investigation of systems was carried out by both the distribution centre and the transport company in an effort to identify areas for improvement to ensure a similar event didn't occur in future.

### **Benefits of Using an External Investigator**

Independence, objectivity, no-bias, no-blame approach. It is important that employers ensure their employees understand that an incident investigation is not a blame exercise but a learning experience. A qualified external Investigator will ensure that the results of an incident or near miss investigation will be used to improve safety systems, hazard control and risk reduction to minimise the likelihood of a serious accident happening in the future.