

2.12 Health and safety in the warehouse

In a warehouse there is the potential for serious incidents or accidents to occur.

Every effort should be made to reduce the risk of accidents:

Equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All equipment (e.g., trolleys, sack trucks and hand-operated pallet trucks) should be carefully and regularly maintained. Specialised equipment must only be used by trained, authorised employees (some equipment may require load testing to ensure they are fit to use). Access in areas where forklift trucks are used should be restricted to prevent people being hit during loading and unloading activities.
Storage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Racking and shelving should be regularly checked. Shelving with collapsing stacks should be immediately restacked. Shelving and racking should be firmly secured to the floor or to the building – if this is not possible, keep racking to only two levels.
Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Toilet facilities and welfare areas should be provided, so that breaks can be taken away from the main warehouse.
Personal safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff must be issued with protective clothing where required (based on an assessment of risk) – specifically, boots and gloves for handling heavy and bulky goods. These must be kept clean and regularly inspected to ensure they are fit for purpose and replaced when they are not. A record of PPE equipment must be kept on site. Ensure all staff are aware of hazards and are fully trained in safe working techniques, including manual handling techniques. First aid kits should be available and regularly checked, and one or more permanent warehouse staff should be trained in basic first aid.
Hazards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All hazardous materials like oils, lubricants and fuels should be assessed so the correct action can be taken if staff are exposed to a spillage. All materials will have a safety data sheet which provides this detail and is available from the manufacturer. Safety data sheet are supplied for all the materials deployed in the ERU modules. Immediately clean up spilt goods, especially oils, lubricants and fuels, as this will reduce the risk of slips and falls, as well as the risk of fire. Expired goods and food items no longer fit for human consumption must be correctly disposed of immediately. Check with local health authorities to determine whether they can be used as animal feed or for the appropriate disposal method: incineration or burial. Smoking is prohibited in the warehouse and adjoining compound. Cooking and open fires should be restricted to designated areas in the compound – never inside the warehouse. Damaged pallets should either be repaired or discarded.

2.12.1 Guidelines for the manual handling of heavy loads

- Assess the weight of the item and ask for help if it is too heavy for you to lift safely.
- Clear a path and know where you are going.
- Lift with your legs and knees.

- Hold the object close to your body with your feet a shoulder-width apart.
- Keep your eyes up and your back straight. Avoid twisting, as this places extra strain on the back.

When undertaking a site risk assessment, contact the local Health and Safety focal point. This will usually be the IFRC in multilateral operations, but it can also be coordinated by the ICRC or the HNS. For warehouses in the UK, the focal contact person is the Health and Safety adviser, who must inspect all buildings used and rented by the BRC.

2.12.2 Fire safety in the warehouse

Warehouse staff must be trained as fire wardens – see the safety training pathway (Section 2.10.4).

For UK warehouse-staff, contact the health and safety team (Health&Safety@redcross.org.uk) to receive fire warden training (a three-hour, face-to-face course).

Fire safety in the warehouse

- Fire safety procedures should include clearly marked fire exits and escape routes marked with the sign used in the country of operation.
- A fire assembly point must be clearly identified.
- The fire safety procedure instructions must be clearly posted around the warehouse and all staff (including National Society volunteers) must be trained on what to do in the event of a fire. The information should be represented in pictures or in the local language as well as in English.
- Fire safety equipment must be present in all warehouses, and a maintenance plan must be in place for each type of equipment. The equipment must be checked by staff on a weekly basis.
- All inflammable materials like oils, lubricants and fuels should be stored together and away from the fire escape routes. This should ideally be outside in a covered and caged area, so that in the event of a fire these items can be extinguished without risk to the main warehouse stock.
- Any fire alarms and smoke detectors must be regularly tested – ideally weekly.
- A fire evacuation drill must be conducted once per rotation of International staff.
- Where possible, it is advisable to liaise with the local fire brigade, to make them aware of the Red Cross activities in the warehouse.

Types of Fire Extinguishers

Symbols found on fire extinguishers & what they mean

	Water	Foam spray	ABC powder	Carbon dioxide	Wet chemical
Wood, paper & textiles (A)	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
Flammable liquids (B)	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗
Flammable gases (C)	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗
Electrical contact	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗
Cooking oils & fats (F)	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓

The fire extinguishers in the ERU modules sent by the British Red Cross are red, with their type identified by a coloured band:

- Red for water
- Cream for foam
- Blue for dry powder
- Black for carbon dioxide

Wet chemical extinguishers are not provided – fire blankets are available for cooking areas.

Examples of useful fire signage



2.12.3 Managing dangerous goods

See Section 2.6.3.5 for details on handling dangerous goods.

There are different regulations in place for different modes of transport and in every country.

Ultimately, for all modes of transport – sea, air, rail, road and inland waterways – the United Nations Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods and other organisations, which includes the International Air Transport Association, have assigned dangerous or hazardous substances one of nine classes, in order to help make the transportation of dangerous goods as safe as possible.

Note that the number of the class of dangerous goods does not indicate the degree of danger.



1. **Explosives:** capable of producing hazardous amounts of heat, light, sound, gas or smoke.
2. **Gases:** includes compressed gases, liquefied gases, dissolved gases, refrigerated liquefied gases and aerosols. Gases are dangerous both because they pose a risk as potential asphyxiants and because of their flammability.
3. **Flammable liquids:** volatile and can give off a flammable vapour.
4. **Flammable solids:** highly combustible and can cause fire through friction.
5. **Oxidising substances:** classified as dangerous goods because, although not necessarily combustible themselves, they can contribute to the combustion of other hazardous substances.
6. **Toxic and infectious substances:** can cause serious injury or death to humans if swallowed, inhaled or by contact with skin. Infectious substances are classified for containing pathogens, including bacteria, viruses, parasites or other agents that can cause disease in humans or animals upon contact.
7. **Radioactive materials:** any substance which contains atoms that are subject to radioactive decay.
8. **Corrosives:** react chemically to damage or destroy material, including living tissue, upon contact.
9. **Miscellaneous:** present a danger not covered by other classes. This class includes environmentally hazardous substances, elevated temperature substances and GMMOs or GMOs.

Dangerous goods require specific documentation and handling methods: packing, moving and transporting them is highly regulated and should be overseen by a third-party service provider.

2.12.4 Safety training pathway

The BRC employs a full-time Health and Safety advisor to facilitate a variety of training, most of which is bespoke. Below is a list of the most common training delivered, most of which can be delivered remotely. The Health and Safety team are working on collating a standard catalogue of the available training; in the meantime, feel free to contact them directly.

The below training courses address safety from an occupational safety perspective and not from a personal security perspective, which is addressed in the HEAT courses developed and managed by the security team based in UKO. The below falls under the delegate refresher requirement and must be refreshed every two years.

	Content	Target audience
Driver safety training	Vehicle, traffic and driver safety awareness training	All drivers of RC vehicles
General safety awareness training	Occupational health and safety (basics)	All staff with roles that involve the manual handling of goods
Risk assessment and management training	How to identify, mitigate and report risks	All managers of staff working in environments where manual handling takes place
Hazardous substances training	How to identify and manage hazardous substances	All staff with roles that involve the manual handling of potentially hazardous goods
Warehouse safety management training	Racking, shelving and handling goods	All warehouse staff
Environmental protection training	Managing the risks of warehouse activities on the environment	All warehouse staff

