

Yellow Alert - Top Heavy Filing Cabinet Tips Over and Injures Worker

Lesson ID: 2008-CH-BNL-BHSO-0001 (Source: User Submitted)

Originating Organization or Contracting Company: DOE Brookhaven Site Office (BHSO)

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Classifier: N/A

Reviewer: Edward A. Sierra

Statement: All workers must be made aware of the potential for filing cabinets to tip over on them. When loading and unloading a filing cabinet, follow the manufacturer's posted instructions on the cabinet. If the instructions are not available, the sequence is normally to load from the bottom up and to unload from the top down. By maintaining weight in the lower drawers, the cabinet is less likely to tip over. Additional engineering controls such as securing the cabinet to the wall should be implemented. All manufacturer's recommendations must be followed for these controls.

Discussion: A Brookhaven Site Office (DOE) administrative worker was assigned the task of sorting through a five-drawer, lateral filing cabinet containing legacy files. Each of the cabinet drawer faces were open with the exception of the bottom drawer face, which opens with the drawer. The worker and others had used this cabinet in the past and did not notice any stability issues. The worker did not notice that the bottom two drawers were empty. The worker decided to start with the top drawer based on the number sequence needed. Once the top drawer was fully extended, the cabinet began to tip onto the worker. The worker was forced to back up a few steps when contact with a desk was made. At this point the worker's left hand was wedged inside the cabinet drawer while attempting to stabilize the fall of the cabinet with the right hand. The worker called for help and a coworker immediately came from the next office to lift the cabinet back up. It was noted that while up-righting the cabinet, the sliding drawers had become fully extended, an indication that the drawer locking mechanism had failed. The worker and the supervisor immediately reported to the Brookhaven National Laboratory (BNL) Occupational Medicine Clinic (OMC). The OMC took an x-ray of the hand and no fractures were found. The worker sustained a bruised and swollen left hand and neck and back spasms. OMC released the worker with ice for swelling. The worker reported to work the next day and was told by OMC to follow-up with an orthopedist for the neck and back spasms. No additional treatment was required and the worker is back to work full-time with no restrictions. Local immediate corrective actions were taken to identify and mitigate cabinets with top heavy drawers.

Analysis: A causal analysis was conducted using the "Five Why's" methodology. The causal factors were:

1. The bottom two drawers had been emptied previously and this action was contrary to the safe loading/unloading instructions.
2. Most workers are not aware of the proper loading/unloading sequence for filing cabinets or where these instructions are posted.
3. Additional engineering controls such as securing filing cabinets to the wall are not routinely utilized.

- Actions:**
1. Identify and mitigate cabinets with improper load issues.
 2. Establish a sequence and/or locate the manufacturer's instructions that address loading/unloading as well as routine use of file cabinets to prevent top heavy issues.
 3. Repost the proper loading/unloading instructions from the sides of drawers to the front of the cabinet to make it clearly visible.
 4. Secure filing cabinets to wall per the manufacturer's recommendation.
 5. Inspect file cabinets during routine office inspections for load issues and drawer safety lock operation.
 6. Prior to receiving used cabinets inspect to ensure safety locking mechanism is functioning.
 7. Include the topic of filing cabinet safety for new employee office worker orientations.

Savings: Injury Prevention

Keywords: 5-DRAWER LATERAL, FILING CABINET, PERSONNEL INJURY

Hazard(s): Personal Injury / Exposure - Mechanical Injury (Striking / Crushing)

ISM Code(s): Analyze Hazards, Develop / Implement Controls, Perform Work

Work Function(s): Occupational Safety & Health - General

References: N/A

Priority Descriptor: Yellow / Caution