Intermodal Safety Briefings

IANA's Intermodal Safety Committee will be contributing content to a new column in *Intermodal Insights* — Intermodal Safety Briefings. Since safety is a core component of intermodal freight transportation and the supply chain, providing members with information that is relevant, timely and actionable will improve safety, foster collaboration and promote positive behaviors. The goals with this column are to help aid in reducing mishaps, injuries and incidents, learn from the experiences of others, raise awareness on critical safety topics, and provide useful content that members can repurpose in their own companies.

Tire and Rim Handling

The proper handling of intermodal chassis tires is a process that seasoned technicians might sometimes take for granted if they have repeated the process many times without incident. But whether they realize it or not, one slip up could literally cost them life and limb.

A tragic example of this occurred in mid-May, when a sideloader tire exploded at a shipping terminal, resulting in the death of one mechanic as well as seriously injuring a second.

While such incidents are rare, they are not completely unheard of.

"There's usually a few incidents each year that you hear about where intermodal chassis technicians end up in the hospital because they did not handle the tire safely, or there was a component on the rim that they did not see was compromised when they were handling the tire and it ended up exploding on them," P&B Intermodal COO Dale Bartley told *Intermodal Insights*.

Ultimately, Bartley said, it all comes down to making sure that the proper procedure is followed, and the risks are looked for and mitigated.

"The challenge is the recommended pressure that goes into tires, particularly on the chassis. We see it on the lift equipment and tractors too, but the frequency of tire changes on chassis in particular is what makes it such a high-level concern on that end of the business," he said.

"The recommended tire pressure is equivalent to the force of dynamite when released suddenly, so if anybody's body parts – or head in particular – is near that tire when the pressure is released, it can result in a significant injury or fatality," Bartley explained, adding that raising awareness of that risk is important, to make sure that team members that have been handling tires for a while don't get complacent.

"The volume of tires that are being changed across the country on an annual basis, there's a risk element to that number," Bartley remarked. "So if in the industry there's a million times a tire's being changed annually, that means there's a million times a piece of dynamite is being handled."

Training and Education Is Critical

The fact that there are still a number of accidents in the industry means that there is a need for stepped up training and education, he said, particularly when it comes to informing workers of the need to let all the air completely release from a tire before proceeding.

"I know of several incidents around the industry just in recent years. It's something that we collectively have been able to mitigate the risk around through the years through education, through better standards and processes for handling tires, but it still occurs today that there are individuals that shortcut the safe tire handling process."

Photo courtesy of American Intermodal Management

Bartley, who has worked in the industry since 1997 and joined chassis and container repair organization P&B in 2012, said that his experience tells him the best defense against tire and rim mishaps is educating and training anyone new to the industry before they perform their first repair.

"Make sure there's certification or acknowledgement of that training, and the understanding that the risk is significant not only to themselves, but to people around them if they do not handle tires safely or shortcut the process, and then have a no-exception or one-and-done policy if there's any sort of compliance violations relative to that individual," he said. "If an individual or a professional's not going to take that risk seriously after being trained on it, then they're setting a bad precedent for others."

Safe Tire Removal

Another safety issue, according to Ports America Equipment Services Manager Timothy Crawford, is the sheer size of tires, particularly on big lift equipment.

"There is always an uncertainty if the lock ring could come off at any time," he said. "The lesson is to use the correct tools to remove the tires, such as a forklift or tire clamp.

"A tire clamp is the best and safest method to removing the tires from this type of equipment," he added. "Install a heavy-duty chain through the wheel and around one side of the tire to ensure the lock ring cannot come flying off when handling the tire."

Letting air out of the tire until it reaches minimal pressure is a very good thing to do as well, he said.