

## When selecting packaging equipment, what factors should I consider to ensure operator safety?

Manual packaging can be a laborious, repetitive, and monotonous task, frequently carried out in a dusty, noisy, or otherwise unpleasant environment. Workplace injuries – such as repetitive strain, breathing or respiratory problems, and hearing loss – can be frequent. Lost time at work, human error, high staff turnover, shift rotations, and mandatory breaks are all a constant drain on productivity and efficiency. Installing an automated solution can address a number of potential safety issues and simultaneously improve productivity, the work environment, and employee morale.

When installing an automated solution, important considerations must be addressed to ensure that the machinery is suitable and safe for use. These considerations include:

- **Ease of operation:** Automated machines must be simple to operate, straightforward, and have intuitive controls that don't require an IT genius to figure out. Complex controls mean frustration and an increased chance of errors that can result in accidents.

- **Machine safety:** This is a critical area. Machine manufacturers should be well aware of regulations governing machine safety and should take action to ensure equipment safety. Some questions to ask the supplier are:

- \* Is the machine guarding fitted and is it adequate?
- \* Are interlocks fitted where required and are they positively acting?
- \* Do fixed guards require tools for removal?

You should consider all safety aspects and functions for the machine, application, and cleaning and maintenance requirements. Think about accessibility as well; it's very easy to enclose a machine for safety, but doing so may make critical actions more time-consuming and difficult. This can result in more downtime and less productivity, and can also produce the exact environment where frustration leads to the removal or disabling of guards, which then exposes more serious hazards.

- **Electrical enclosures:** Some questions to ask the supplier are:

- \* Is the enclosure locked?
- \* Are all enclosures fitted with electrical warning signs?
- \* Are the enclosures free from debris and foreign objects?

- **Operators:** Consider your staff. Involve them in the process and ensure that they're correctly trained and competent. This includes operators, maintenance technicians, cleaners, and anyone else who comes into contact with the machinery. Make sure you train them on proper procedures so they understand their responsibilities and the value of the machinery to your business. When automating a traditionally manual process, operators are often cynical or sometimes even hostile to such a change. By involvement and training you'll achieve a better, more productive, and safer environment.

In summary, when considering safety on your new packaging system, don't just look at the number of emergency stop buttons or how much mesh surrounds it. Consider the employees who'll be operating and maintaining the packaging system. Involve those employees in the process and make them want the machine as much as you do. And remember, by moving to automation in the first place you're taking the biggest step to improving health and safety issues for your workforce.

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## My new product will be packaged in bulk bags. How can I determine whether the bulk bags will require a liner?

Your bulk bags will require a liner if:

- You're handling a very light, powdery product or a food-grade product.
- Your product draws moisture or needs moisture protection.
- Your product has clean storage, sanitary, or specific shipment requirements or contamination concerns.
- Your product is susceptible to oxygen transfer.
- Your product's small micron size easily sifts through standard woven polypropylene bags.
- Your product's temperature will damage the bulk bag.

Keep in mind that liners don't provide product protection against bag damage like forklift strike or other rough handling.

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