

RackCare – Effective Racking Management

After over 25 years of General Logistics Management, my career took an unusual change of direction when I was reacquainted with an old colleague telling me of his new concept in pallet racking protection, the Rackdefender.

As a commercially minded logistics professional with a background of own account and third party logistics general management I had never really studied the merits of rack protection. My management input to such things was restricted to expressions of annoyance upon the arrival of the invoice for racking damage repairs.

The Rackdefender immediately struck me as an alternative to the messy bolted steel solutions that appeared to do little but look untidy after a couple of months. The traditional bolted guards had an amazing ability to collect dirt and debris around them, making tidy warehouses look untidy. Whilst the Rackdefender was impressive, I thought it would be worthwhile to hear the opinion of some of my old colleagues. To my surprise even the more conservative amongst them thought the Rackdefender was a good and effective solution to upright damage.

I was convinced and Just Barriers was created to develop the Rackdefender range of products.

My introduction to the racking protection decision making process came in my discussions with users with ongoing racking damage. I would often be told; “we can’t afford protection because the cost of repairing the damage is more than I thought, so I haven’t any money

left in my budget”. A timely reminder that whilst the product may be exactly what the customer needs, he has to realise that he has a problem and needs the product.

I very rapidly concluded that racking seemed to only ever provide bad news, rather like a fire! On this point, a major racking collapse during working hours would be similar to a fire, but without any alarm or time to evacuate. The casualties could be higher and the impact on the business similar in magnitude.

Despite my extensive experience in Logistics operations I was in for a shock! I had spent my time in very large warehouses operated for major retailers and had the fun of Greenfield start ups.

However, I was not prepared to discover the extent of racking damage and the almost non-existent lines of accountability.

I would visit major logistics player’s warehouses to put Rackdefenders in on trial to discover that our protection was only going to cure one part of the real problem.

Whilst Rackdefenders invariably proved to be the solution to stopping the damage, they alone could not make the structural and management changes needed to get control of the ‘damage’ problem.

The larger the warehouse and the organisation, the greater is the likelihood of a detached view of racking damage, and certainly less direct lines of accountability. It is almost as if the warehouse manager’s team cause the damage, which is then passed to his facilities manager or contractor to fix. The health and safety team sometimes audited this process or acted as prompts. At a general

management level there is much concern at the direct repair cost, but little understanding of the *total business costs* caused by racking damage.

The table below is a typical summary of the perspectives we received that illustrate the differing attitudes to racking damage. Perhaps the fundamental question each racking user should ask of his organisation is; “If there were to be a racking collapse, who would be accountable?” In most instances there would be a desperate rush to apportion accountability.

Functional Perspective of Racking Damage Safety Management				
Issue	Level of Interest/Priority			
	Health & Safety Team	Operational Team	Facilities Team	HSE
Speed of repair	2	3	1	3
Cost of Repair	1	2	3	1
Control of Process	3	2	1	3
Analysis of Damage	3	2	1	3

High Importance = 3
 Average Importance = 2
 Low Importance = 1

The commercial reality of modern warehousing and logistics is that if 'you don't fill your warehouse' you are losing revenue. When one damaged upright can take 20 or more locations out of service, the operator is faced with:

- The Repair Costs
- The lost revenue/external storage costs.
- Costs of relocating pallets to safe locations

From a health and safety perspective the damaged racking can easily be fixed in time, but it creates multiple unsafe locations that increase risk.

There is often no structured approach or auditable trail of the removal of these unsafe locations from service. Likewise, there is invariably a lack of a control process for their return to service.

Rarely is there an integrated approach in existence. There is typically no single source of information, or a joined up approach to managing the racking. An often used statement is; "that there isn't time to inspect the racking every week or even each month so we have it checked every 6 months or a year by an independent inspector". Of course, this approach is very applicable where the damage occurs the day or a few days before the inspection!

Unlike most other equipment, racking damage does not generally 'stop' the job. Broken fork lifts, roller shutter doors, conveyers and wrapping machines all have an immediate impact on output ..

Racking damage and safety is perceived to only involve the cost of repair. There is little appreciation of the cost of lost space and or the disruption and cost of relocating stock from unsafe locations.

This explains why racking damage is ignored on the radar screen!

Rarely is its size, intensity and risk recognised. It is, in many ways, an irritating bleep of interference that would cost money to remove, but everyone knows it will be back!

My General Management experienced told me “if I can measure this, I can manage the problem.” The plan was to design a process that joined up the differing perspectives. A process that involved everyone at every level and, most importantly, a process that gave safe and controlled results.

After 6 weeks work we had the basic principles of the process the key control points and operational methods:

- **Health & Safety Team** – Structured Control process
- **Operational Team** – Overview of all location affected
- **Facilities Team** – Identify Remedial actions
- **General Management** – All of the above, plus indirect cost analysis and KPI's

The real challenge involved the operational practices. Bearing in mind that one location can be affected by multiple damage and that damage condition status can change, the location management systems need to be updated from the inspection and repair process.

The control and release of repairs needed to interface with other management systems. It was important that the solution was a complete process with full documentation and strict control of process compliance.

We now have RackCare process that truly does all those things that we thought we needed and those we then found we needed

The simple process took over 9 months of design, redesign, testing and implementation. As our IT team leader said, if 'I'd had known we were going to arrive here, I would have started from elsewhere!' A typical IT based project then!

Designing the reports was originally straightforward, because we all thought that we knew what we wanted. However, we soon discovered that the RackCare system was a highly dynamic and powerful reporting tool and is therefore capable of producing multi-dimensional reports. Hence, Rackcare is not a report based process; rather it is monitored by a real time 'dashboard' which has separate dynamic displays giving detailed real time measurements.

The Dashboard shows

- synchronisation with location control systems
- Total locations affected by status and lost secondary unsafe locations
- Locations pending repairs, allocated to repair, with parameter driven repair orders
- Overall analysis of damage status, lost space cost and estimated repair costs

The Rackcare process begins with an inspection of the racks; when damage is found the details are recorded either via bar code data collection or tick box record forms. A special tag is secured at the location of the damage, and the details of the damage and associated unsafe locations are entered into the Rackcare system.

The system then controls and monitors the instructions and confirmation of the removal from service of the unsafe locations. Full details of the total locations and subsequent removal from service are displayed on the dashboard. From these displays the planning, allocation and control of repairs can be undertaken by the facilities team.

RackCare ensures that no unsafe locations can be released back into service without certified clearance of all damage through the RackCare repair and release process.

In addition to all the real time reporting of estimated repair costs and actual repair costs, the system is capable of producing extensive historic reports, and provide comparisons to live key performance indicators.

Rackcare is capable of multi-user access, and therefore can provide real time remote monitoring of individual site performance. This ensures that, for example, the central Health and safety team are able to monitor the corporate 'risk' from their remote desk top.

RackCare unlocks the secret code book on racking management.

Unlike other systems it is designed for racking users and is not an

adapted inspector's record or contractors repair report. The latest edition of the HSE guidelines for Retail and Wholesale warehouses deals in great detail with the classification of racking damage and the action required to minimise the risks. However, it only states that the user should have "a method to ensure that the damaged locations are removed from service and only returned when certified as repaired." This places the onus on the user since the HSE have deliberately not defined the process. Therefore, any failing or perceived failing will be an area of vulnerability to the user. RackCare has the complete functionality required by the HSE, and gives even more back to the effective management of the business.

The Rackcare process is designed to become the benchmark by which all other control processes are judged.

Significant Logistics operators who have had a detailed presentation of RackCare have identified it as an excellent strategic tool for their businesses and a number are about to undertake site trials. In the meantime, RackCare is in service and in trial with a number of well known third party logistics and major food retailers.

RackCare fulfils its purpose to make a safer and more efficient work place. No longer should incomplete or unstructured processes be accepted and the standards of racking safety and management can be raised to a new level.

RackCare very simply, puts you back in control.

About the author

Chris Cooper B. Sc (Econ), MILT, is Managing Director of Just Barriers Ltd, an independent specialist provider of racking protection and management systems.

He has many years experience both 3PL and own account operations. He has held senior positions with TDG, Wincanton, Unigate, and more recently as Managing Director of a specialist logistics service provider based in Manchester.

Chris, is a Board member of the UKWA, and has also been a member of the CILT for over 25 years, he continues to hold a full LGV.