Q & A With Mr. John B. Nofsinger, Material Handling Industry Of America

Mr. John B. Nofsinger

Mr. John B. Nofsinger is chief executive officer of the Material Handling Industry of America (MHIA) **[1]**, an international trade association representing the interests of the material handling and logistics industry in the U.S. Mr. Nofsinger has nearly 40 years of experience in the material handling and logistics industry, and serves on the Board of Governors and Executive Committee of Material Handling Industry, Boards of Directors of Material Handling Industry of America (MHIA), and Material Handling Education Foundation. He is also Managing Executive for the Rack Manufacturers Institute (RMI), and serves on the Board of the Charlotte Roundtable of the Council of Supply Chain Management Professionals.

Q: What type of a role does MHIA play in the industry? What are the organization's main goals?
Nofsinger: MHIA provides a lawfully constituted structure by and through which competitors might address appropriate issues of common importance to various publics served. Our goals include maintaining a representative membership and representing the USA material handling and logistics industry on a worldwide basis through relevant programming.
Members build awareness, recognition and credibility through their direct participation in activities like:

- Development of consensus on national, international Standards.
- Shared statistical information and forecasts.
- Research.
- Trade shows and conferences.
- Regular meetings.
- Participation in product sections, councils, and affiliated trade associations.
- Web listings and tools.
- Various networking opportunities.
- Education and training.
- Publishing.

- Serving as a liaison to sister organizations, worldwide, worker and workplace safety organizations, and universities.

Q: What critical issues do you see in material handling and logistics – i.e. what is keeping management up at night?
Nofsinger: In our recent Annual Report, I summarized some of the major issues facing industries, including:

- Disruptive demographics: How to identify and understand potential material handling and logistics labor populations, their needs and availability.
- Research: How to develop a clear research agenda that will assure ample supply and critical mass of both innovation and skills in the workplace of the future.
- Education: How to extend educational outreach throughout the “people supply chain.”
- Next generation supply chains: How to create a vision and road map, and identify associated material handling and logistics challenges.
- Collaboration: How to engage, focus, and energize all communities of material handling and logistics interest.
- Sustainability: How to integrate material handling and logistics solutions into sustainability mandates.
- Security: How to provide for supply chain business continuity in the face of security disruptions.
- Disaster response: How to organize and mobilize material handling and logistics communities of interest to effectively respond to national disasters.
- Technology: How to create transfer mechanisms and open/interoperable equipment and systems.
- Globalization: How to address the needs of U.S. industries in the context of global supply chains/processes.

Q: Discuss some of the most late-and-breaking technologies in material handling equipment and warehouse management. What are some of the biggest trends you have been seeing?
Nofsinger: Our recently concluded NA 2008 Exhibition and Conference provided a great look at the best of the best solutions to material handling and logistics challenges.

For the most part, year on year change has been evolutionary in nature and both enhances traditional equipment as well as allows greater integration of technologies and processes:

- Solutions that support lean initiatives.
- Solutions that support sustainability initiatives.
- Numerous worker and workplace safety solutions.
- IT solutions that promote transparent and seamless flow of goods and information on a concurrent basis.
- Solutions that enhance productivity.

- Modularity.

Q: In terms of safety and ergonomics, what are the most important equipment features DC management should consider?
Nofsinger: The Ergonomics Assist and Systems and Equipment Council (EASE) of MHIA recently collaborated with Cal-OSHA, NIOSH and CNA Insurance to produce a milestone document entitled "Ergonomic Guidelines for Manual Material Handling." The document discusses ergonomic, engineering, and administrative improvements.

A section on equipment use summarizes some useful guidelines that speak (in part) to features as follows:

EQUIPMENT

- Know your load and buy equipment of appropriate capacity. Remember, lighter-weight equipment in easier to move.
- Choose equipment appropriate for the material(s) being handled, the layout and design of your workplace, and the work tasks being performed.
- Consider using powered– rather than non-powered– when pushing or pulling forces are excessive.
- If available, select equipment with vertical handles so workers' hands can be in their power zone.
- Choose wheeled equipment which minimizes start forces (inertia) and reduces rolling resistance. The amount of force required to move loads with wheeled equipment depends on a number of factors including:
- The weight and shape of the load.
- The type and condition of the floor surface (e.g., smoothness, density, and other factors).
- The type of wheels (i.e., the materials they are made of).
- The size of wheels (larger wheels a minimum of 6 inches in diameter move more easily over holes, bumps, and floor irregularities).
- The maintenance of the wheels— it is important to clean, lubricate, and/or replace wheels on a regular basis.

Other important steps:

- Ground all electrically operated equipment.
- Make sure all equipment alarms and warning devices are audible and working properly.
- Inspect and maintain equipment according to manufacturers' recommendations.
- Follow all manufacturers' recommendations for proper equipment use

WORK ENVIRONMENT

- Clear the aisles and doorways for safe passage and maneuvering of equipment.
- Set barriers that prevent employees from coming close to or beneath supported or moving loads.
- In tight spaces, use equipment with four swivel casters or wheels. Loads are easier to turn and control.

WORK PRACTICES

- Train employees on proper equipment use and appropriate work practices.
- Push and pull equipment with the entire body instead of with just arms and shoulders.
- When pushing or pulling use both hands when feasible.
- To move heavy loads over long distances, either reduce the load or use powered equipment.
- Inspect pallets before loading or moving them.

Q: What are the best ways to "go green" in terms of material handling and logistics?

Nofsinger: Our recent NA 2008 Show and Conference presented a number of features related to the subject of sustainability/green. To position the subject we created 10 steps to a greener supply chain video that speaks to the process a company might follow toward implementing sustainable/green strategies. The steps go on to say:

1. Make the business case
2. Get top-level buy-in and accountability
3. Empower your employees
4. Benchmark your supply chain sustainability
5. Develop a sustainability plan
6. Identify the low-hanging fruit first
7. Develop sustainability scorecards for suppliers
8. Help your suppliers succeed
9. Review your performance
10. Be transparent and publicize your efforts

Another feature of NA 2008 was a special Keynote presentation on Earth Day by the acclaimed author and strategist on Sustainability, Andrew Winston. His message was based on his book Green to Gold– How Smart Companies use Environmental Strategy to Innovate, Create Value, and Build Competitive Advantage.

The NA 2008 exhibit floor was full of technologies and solutions that support green initiatives, including:

- Energy and emission efficient motors, engines, drives and controls.
- Returnable and reusable packaging and containing equipment.
- Measuring and monitoring software.
- Products high in recyclables.
- Facility environmental equipment and control

Q: Describe the function of MHIA.org's benchmarking tool, and what types of information it might provide for users.

Nofsinger: The Material Handling Audit Tool provides a comprehensive audit of material handling in a facility. The MH audit tool takes the user through a series of questions related to material handling system implementation and effectiveness to help users determine what material handling functions represent the greatest areas of opportunity for improvement. These questions are divided into two broad categories— material handling functions, and aspects of material handling systems.

Five material handling functions are considered: Receiving, Shipping, Storage of Raw Materials, Storage of Finished Goods, and General Process Functions. Five aspects of material handling systems are considered: Equipment, Space, Material, People, and Information. The five material handling functions and the five aspects of material handling systems are arrayed in a five by five matrix.

The user can select all or a subset of the cells within the matrix to audit. After choosing which areas to audit, the audit tool will provide the user with questions related to the selected cells. The audit tool notes the user's answers to these questions and creates an evaluation report that indicates which aspects of the material handling system should be investigated for possible improvements and efficiency gains.

The MH Audit tool is available for downloading in either a PC or Pocket PC version at www.mhia.org/industrygroups/cicmhe/audittool [2].

In regards to other web resources, MHIA has just completed a major rewrite and redesign of www.mhia.org [3]. The site is content and resource rich and includes:

- A unique "Learning Center" to help visitors define and locate helpful content.
- Search and sort utilities to find solutions providers, brands, etc.
- Expert guidance from MHIA's many product sections, councils, and affiliated trade associations.
- A comprehensive book store containing a wide variety of technical and educational publications, many available for free download. These include formats such as case studies, market research, global resources, newsletter archives, news on MHIA exhibitions, membership information, and more

For more information, visit www.mhia.org [3].

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[1] http://www.mhia.org/
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