

POWERCHOCK TRUCK RESTRAINTS KEEP FOOD GIANT SAFE

As the world's largest full-line distributor of food and related products, Texas-based SYSCO Corporation moves a whole lot of eatables in and out of its more than 320 food distribution facilities in 90 countries around the world. Here Alexander Simm, the Fleet & Facility Manager at SYSCO Pittsburgh talks to GMR Safety about the company's successful use of the Powerchock vehicle restraint system.



Alex Simm
Facility Manager – Pittsburgh



A LONG-TERM PARTNERSHIP | Some of the 49 doors at the SYSCO facility in Pittsburgh, PA.

GMR Safety: First of all, we know about SYSCO's overall scale of operation and the fact your no less than 13,000 trucks are a familiar sight on the roads both here in the US and all over the world. But can you tell us a little about the SYSCO operation here in Pittsburgh?

AI: SYSCO Pittsburgh is a 352,000 sq. ft. facility that distributes fresh and frozen meat, seafood, fruits, vegetables and many other foods and food products to the local community and throughout the state to a wide range of establishments and food service outlets such as restaurants, schools, hotels, hospitals etc.

GMR Safety: That staff-count and volume of traffic obviously makes dock area safety a major area of importance to you. What sort of safety challenges were you addressing when you originally looked at wheel restraint systems?

AI: At that time we were basically just looking for a safe and accurate dock messaging system so truck drivers knew when their truck was ready and safe to pull away from the dock.

GMR Safety: Did you find a good system?

AI: Well, we started out using basic rubber wheel chocks on chains. But these proved inadequate and we then moved on to metal chocks. Again, these brought their own problems because we found that the chocks were gouging out big grooves in the concrete floor. The system also relied on a spring-mounted microswitch on the doors which activated the lights and alerted the staff but these were definitely not foolproof.

GMR Safety : How did these challenges impact your business?

AI: The problem this set-up brought was due to the amount of ongoing maintenance that was required to keep it working. When it didn't, which was quite frequently, it meant that the affected dock had to be closed on safety grounds, a response that remains in place. As a result, every day a maintenance man had to go round and check every loading dock and make sure the lights were being correctly triggered. This continuous daily maintenance was clearly not a sustainable solution.



GMR Safety: SYSCO has now been using the Powerchock vehicle restraint since 2008 and gradually equipping up to 35 facilities across the country. What do you think are its major benefits?

AI: I've already mentioned the problems we had with metal chocks damaging concrete when under load. The Powerchock ground plate completely solves this issue. **Another huge benefit of Powerchock relates to its sheer reliability.** We have found it to be **very reliable and robust in use, even when it takes the occasional beating it still continues to work** and I don't think I've ever had to buy more than a couple of replacement bulbs when it comes to spares. Basically the **uncomplicated design means that there is not too much to go wrong, and the maintenance costs are therefore very little.**

GMR Safety: We are very proud of our reputation for reliability and durability and we are so confident with the Powerchock that it comes with a 5-year warranty. And, in fact, the restraining plate is a GMR Safety-patented part of the design.

You talk about Powerchock truck wheel chocks being able to 'take a beating' have you got any examples?

AI: We once had a case of a truck driver who tried to drive off, but the unit is designed so that the force was transferred to a bolt that took the stress and sheared. So, although we had some pulled wires it resulted in no actual damage to the chock and the arm themselves. A quick check and a replacement of the bolt and we were up and running again.

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GMR Safety: Any other features you particularly like about the Powerchock vehicle restraint?

AI: One important point is that we have found them to work great in all weathers. And, compared to a simple wheel chock, the Powerchock is part of an integrated system which not only prevents drive-off and trailer creep but incorporates sensors that detect the presence of a truck and relay this to the indicator board to alert operators that it is safe to enter the trailer. And vice-versa, the driver is alerted when the chock is removed indicating that it is safe to move off.



The winter adapted restraining plate of POWERCHOCK is a key element to cope with the snowplowing in colder regions.

GMR Safety: What do the people working in the loading bays think about the Powerchock trailer restraint system?

AI: They are pretty satisfied with it. Actually, if you don't hear really hear about something then you can assume it's doing its job. It's only when it doesn't do its job or it creates unnecessary or unforeseen problems that you get a reaction. The workforce is pretty much on the ball when it comes to safety-related matters so we used to get a lot of negative feedback on the old system because it wasn't foolproof.

GMR Safety: That's pretty much what we find at GMR Safety too. When we don't hear from a client it almost invariably means that all is good! But what about the incoming drivers? Do they ever have any problems with the Powerchock wheel restraint?

AI: No, never. In fact, all they have to do, is put the chock in front of the wheel. They are not allowed to touch or operate anything else. Even if they were, it would probably not present any problems because of the **common-sense design and operation of the equipment.**

GMR Safety: Finally, GMR Safety has now been working with SYSCO for well over a decade. From a personal perspective how do you think this partnership has worked?

AI: **We greatly value our good relationship with GMR Safety.** Here at SYSCO we pride ourselves on our loyalty to reliable and innovative suppliers that work in partnership with us and provide good service and value.

We'd like to thank Alexander Simm for his time and his insightful feedback.