Forklift Safety – Safety Talk



WHAT'S AT STAKE?

Everyone knows that forklifts drive the engine of our warehouses, plants and other industrial settings. Forklifts move, lift and carry material and merchandise to and for consumers. Unfortunately, fatalities occur in forklift operations throughout our economy.

The most common way someone dies in an accident involving a forklift is when the vehicle tips over. Forklift injuries occur most commonly in the manufacturing sector, followed by the construction, wholesale trade, and transportation industries.

WHAT'S THE DANGER?

American workers face a wide variety of dangers in the workplace, and accidents that occur at work can cause serious or fatal injuries. Forklift accidents are unfortunately common, and many can be prevented by following simple safety recommendations. In the United States, there are 61,800 forklift accidents per year, with 34,900 of these accidents resulting in serious injury. Most unfortunately, there are about 85 forklift accidents every year in which one or more people die.

HERE IS A BREAKDOWN OF THE MOST COMMON CAUSES OF FORKLIFT ACCIDENTS:

1. **Poorly Trained Driver**

A poorly trained driver might not know how to respond to a changing workplace. New inventory, obstacles and employees, or changes in floor gradient, can all cause problems for an inexperienced operator. It helps to incorporate a comprehensive certification process in the operators' training program.

2. **Speeding**

All too often, drivers become comfortable and drive irresponsibly. In some cases, workers are under pressure to finish the job quickly or meet a time line. OSHA advises drivers to stay at or below 5 miles per hour. Even if the vehicle stops, the load may topple during harsh braking.

3. **Operating a Forklift with an Elevated Load**

This happens often in all sorts of industries. OSHA regulations encourage drivers to carry loads as near to the ground as possible, approximately 4 inches from the floor

4. **Improper Turning**

Forklifts are designed to balance heavy loads. So without a load, they’re not necessarily the sturdiest machines. Turning a corner too fast can cause the lift to tilt to one side. The correct approach is to slow down well before the turn and maintain a gradual speed through the entire rotation.

5. **Insufficient Warnings and Markings**

In workplaces with both foot- and forklift traffic, it’s an absolute necessity to mark forklift zones. Even if people must walk through these zones on a regular basis, they know when to watch out for heavy machinery. There are a number of ways to mark a forklift zone. While paint and standing signs work, floor tape is perhaps the most efficient option. If any wears or tears happen, it’s easy to replace a small section of tape, which isn’t true for standing signs or even paint. Also, floor tape is easy to apply, and you don’t have to shut down production to get the job done.

6. **Giving Rides or Riding on the Forklift Load**

This is a common case of irresponsible operation. Under no circumstances should a driver transport a worker on a forklift load. Likewise, workers that are helping to load the truck should never use their body parts to balance a load.

7. **Workplace Design**

When purchasing forklifts, make sure it’s the right design for your needs. If you work in a warehouse with minimal aisle space, invest in a narrow-aisle lift. Workplace design can have a major impact on safe forklift operation.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

TAKE THESE STEPS TO PROTECT YOURSELF IF YOU OPERATE AROUND FORKLIFTS

- Do not operate a forklift unless you have been trained and licensed.
- Use seatbelts if they are available.
- Report to your supervisor any damage or problems that occur to a forklift during your shift.
- Do not jump from an overturning, sit-down type forklift. Stay with the truck, holding on firmly and leaning in the opposite direction of the overturn.
- Exit from a stand-up type forklift with rear-entry access by stepping backward if a lateral tip over occurs.
- Use extreme caution on grades or ramps.
- On grades, tilt the load back and raise it only as far as needed to clear the road surface.
- Do not raise or lower the forks while the forklift is moving.
- Do not handle loads that are heavier than the weight capacity of the forklift.
- Operate the forklift at a speed that will permit it to be stopped safely.
- Slow down and sound the horn at cross aisles and other locations where vision is obstructed.
- Look toward the travel path and keep a clear view of it.
- Do not allow passengers to ride on forklift trucks unless a seat is provided.
- When dismounting from a forklift, set the parking brake, lower the forks or lifting carriage, and neutralize the controls.
- Do not drive up to anyone standing in front of a bench or other fixed object.
- Do not use a forklift to elevate workers who are standing on the forks.
- Elevate a worker on a platform only when the vehicle is directly below the work area.

- Whenever a truck is used to elevate personnel, secure the elevating platform to the lifting carriage or forks of the forklift.
- Use a restraining means such as rails, chains, or a body belt with a lanyard or deceleration device for the worker(s) on the platform.
- Do not drive to another location with the work platform elevated.

The following safety tips can help you address some of the most dangerous circumstances and keep your forklift operators and other workers safe:

1. **No unauthorized operators.** Forklift operators must have special training that is specific to both the workplace and the type of forklift they will be operating. Unauthorized workers operating forklifts—such as an employee who jumps on the forklift to move an item "just to help out"—are extremely dangerous to themselves and others. Make sure that all of your workers know that only trained operators can operate forklifts. Also, be sure workers under age 18 know that it is illegal for minors to operate forklifts.
2. **Handle with care.** The forklift itself is a hazard, but the load can be, too. Train operators and other workers to stack and secure the load so that it will not shift during transport. When the forklift is in motion, the load should be carried as close to the ground as possible
3. **Keep clear of the load.** A raised load on a forklift is just like any other raised load—a hazard to anyone close enough to be struck by it if it falls. Emphasize to forklift operators and other workers that they have to stay clear of raised loads—not just out from under them but out from in front of them and a clear distance to the side, too. That distance may need to be larger as the load is raised higher.
4. **Use the right forklift.** The forklift has to be made for the conditions it will be used in—indoor, outdoor, or both; rough terrain or smooth concrete; or potentially flammable atmospheres. Even the load must be considered when choosing a forklift, such as how much the load weighs and how the load will need to be maneuvered.
5. **Know the territory.** Terrain affects forklift balance and handling; for example, even a pothole can be a tip-over hazard under unfortunate circumstances. Forklift operators need to know how to safely navigate up and down slopes and around corners, both with and without a load. If they work outdoors they also need to know how to deal with weather conditions. Workers who will be loading and unloading trucks or railcars need to know how to secure dock plates and bridge plates.
6. **Maintain visibility.** The hazard that kills a forklift operator or other worker could be the one he or she never sees coming. Provide clearly visible markings at edges of loading docks and other areas where forklifts could roll off, along with other precautions such as guardrails and chains. Warn drivers that going from bright light to dim light can blind them just long enough for them to strike another object or person, so they need to take special care under these conditions. Don't stack materials at corners in a way that obstructs an operator's visibility, and use mirrors to show both operators and pedestrians what's coming around the corner.
7. **Separate the men from the machines.** The combination of forklifts and workers on foot is a deadly one—usually for the worker on foot. As much as possible, create separate aisles for workers on foot and mechanical equipment. Instruct operators to look in the direction of travel at all times and keep a clear view of where they're going.

FINAL WORD

Treat forklifts with respect we cannot do without forklift operations in our industrial and manufacturing world. But we can do without the injuries, illnesses and fatalities that occur in forklift operations.