Forklift Safety – The Danger Zone Meeting Kit



WHAT'S AT STAKE

Forklifts are powerful tools on the jobsite – but they can also be deadly. The real danger isn't always the machine itself, but the space around it. This is what's known as the "danger zone" – the area where workers on foot are at highest risk of being struck, pinned, or crushed by a moving forklift.

One step too close, one wrong turn, or one distracted moment is all it takes to turn a normal workday into a tragic one. Whether you're driving or walking, understanding the forklift danger zone could save your life – or someone else's.

WHAT'S THE DANGER

The The forklift danger zone isn't a myth – it's a moving, unpredictable risk zone that surrounds the machine at all times.

Rear-End Swing – Danger Behind the Driver – Unlike cars, forklifts steer with the rear wheels. That means the back of the forklift swings wide during turns – fast and with force.

- A worker standing just a foot too close can be knocked over, pinned, or crushed in an instant.
- This happens most often in tight aisles or congested areas, especially when the operator can't see you.

Blind Spots and Limited Visibility – When a forklift is carrying a large or tall load, the driver's forward vision can be completely blocked. In some cases, they'll reverse instead – but reversing brings its own visibility issues.

- Forklifts have major blind spots in the front and rear, especially when loaded.
- Even with backup alarms, mirrors, or cameras, workers have been struck or run over simply because they weren't seen.

Crushing and Pinning Incidents – One of the most serious hazards is being caught between a moving forklift and a stationary object.

- Loading docks, racking systems, walls, and parked trailers are all deadly pinch points.

- Even slow-moving forklifts have enough weight and force to crush limbs or kill on impact.

And don’t forget the forks themselves:

- Forks can protrude low and be nearly invisible to workers walking nearby. People have tripped, been speared, or hit in the legs — especially in poor lighting or cluttered spaces.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

The danger zone around a forklift isn’t some marked-off box — it’s constantly shifting. It moves with the machine, and so do the risks. Whether you’re walking nearby or behind the wheel, everyone plays a role in preventing struck-by or crush incidents. Here’s how to stay safe — and keep others safe too.

Forklifts might not look fast, but when you’re in the danger zone, even slow movement can be deadly.

- Stay at least 6 feet away from any operating forklift — especially around corners, tight aisles, and loading docks.
- Avoid walking between a forklift and a wall, rack, trailer, or fixed surface. That’s the number one place where crush injuries happen.
- Never walk under elevated forks, even if the load looks stable. One failure could send hundreds of pounds crashing down.

Make Eye Contact — Don’t Assume They See You

Forklift operators have limited visibility — mirrors and alarms help, but they’re not perfect.

- **Always make eye contact** with the driver before crossing in front, behind, or near the machine.
- Use clear hand signals if you’re helping to guide — and wait for a return signal before moving.
- If you’re unsure whether the operator sees you — assume they don’t. Back away and wait.

Stick to Walkways and Pedestrian Zones

- Use marked walkways, even if they take a little longer. Cutting through forklift lanes isn’t worth the risk.
- Be extra cautious at intersections, blind corners, and dock doors — forklifts can appear without warning.
- Don’t gather or take breaks near active work zones. Forklifts can’t stop on a dime.

Operators: Know Your Blind Spots and Protect Your Crew

- Always do a 360° check before moving. Don’t rely on mirrors alone — they miss a lot.
- Use your horn at intersections and when exiting trailers, racks, or enclosed areas.
- If someone enters your blind spot, stop immediately. A second of caution is better than a lifetime of regret.
- Keep your forks low during travel — it improves visibility and reduces tip-over risk.

Don’t forget: If you’re unsure what’s behind or beside you, get a spotter. No load is worth a life.

Stay Focused – No Phones, No Shortcuts – Distraction is one of the top causes of struck-by incidents.

- Don’t check your phone while walking in forklift zones.
- Don’t text, eat, or rush through your path just to save a few seconds.
- Forklifts move silently compared to other vehicles – you might not hear them until it’s too late.

FINAL WORD

The forklift danger zone is real – and it moves with the machine. Whether you’re operating or on foot, one blind spot, one misstep, or one second of distraction is all it takes for a normal day to end in tragedy. Stay alert, stay visible, and stay out of the line of fire. Your safety depends on it.