Forklift and Pedestrian Safety

Powered industrial equipment has played a major role in the surge of total goods output annually. Forklifts and hand trucks have eased the burden of moving heavy, awkward loads, enabling one employee to accomplish the back-breaking work of several. Order-pickers are able to use storage space more effectively, material can be stacked higher and still maintain a degree of safety and aisle space is no longer at premium.

The front-end loader has revolutionized the material handling aspects of industries by negating the need for handling tons of material by a less-efficient manual means. Industrial application of powered industrial trucks has progressed to the point of nearly total dependence on this equipment to maintain current sales and profit levels.

Accompanying this tremendous increased dependency on powered industrial equipment was an added potential for accidents and injuries in the workplace. The relative frequency of accidents is low, but the potential remains. Generally speaking, the affect of operation of powered industrial trucks is the responsibility of two factions – the operators and the "pedestrians."

The Operator
As an operator, it is essential that you are familiar with the equipment you operate. Poor maintenance and upkeep is responsible for some injuries, so these items should be checked daily by the operator:

- a full battery charge on electric trucks and fuel levels in LP, gas or diesel equipment
- all engine fluid levels and associated leaks
- tires for cuts or defects
- steering control
- horn and reverse indicators all warning lights
- brakes (including emergency) and clutch operation
- all controls to make sure they are working properly
- operator safety devices, overhead guards and fire extinguishers to ensure that they are in place and functioning
- unusual engine sounds or faulty operation

If any of these items are defective or unsafe, report them to your supervisor immediately and remove the equipment from service until the repairs can be made. This is one of the operator's primary responsibilities.

The hazards of operating equipment on the job are similar to those associated with driving a car. Plant equipment is operated at lower speeds, but the weight of the hand truck can be equal to that of a full-size sedan, a lift truck as much as five or six times more, and a front-end loader about 20 tons. So what is gained in slower operating speeds is more than offset by the bulk of the equipment. As professional drivers, you should always drive defensively by accepting full responsibility for preventing accidents and injuries to yourself and your co-workers.

There are five key elements of good defensive driving:

- Knowledge – Make it your business to thoroughly understand the different kinds of equipment you operate; be aware of the operating hazards and know the appropriate methods for avoiding them.
- Alertness – More accidents are attributed to inattention than to any other cause. Keep your attention focused on your driving and avoid distractions in the workplace.
• Foresight – Operator foresight can be improved by carefully checking each load to make sure it’s secure and considering your possible travel routes. When situations are potentially hazardous, check with your supervisor.
• Judgment – The operator must have the ability to perceive a particular situation and available alternatives based on knowledge, experience – and common sense. Coupled with alertness, judgment plays a major role in avoiding accidents.
• Skill – It can only be developed by learning to do things correctly every time. Repetition of the actions results in good defensive driving habits, which are required in order to maneuver in the plant’s surroundings.

The Pedestrian
Lift trucks probably play only an indirect part in your job. Because your exposure to trucks may be limited, there is a natural inclination to put them out of your mind. But in analyzing the numerous collisions between workers and machines each year, inattention and a disregard for moving equipment are major contributing factors.

The routine involved in seeing the lift trucks as a matter of course may be partly responsible for accidents. But as a pedestrian, you must shoulder some of the responsibility for the prevention of accidents and injuries.

The first step toward the harmonious existence of worker and machine is familiarizing yourself with the various types of equipment and their regular travel routes. During the course of the day, the noises generated by plant operations blend into a low-pitched hum. But by making a conscious effort to distinguish the sounds of the various types of equipment, you'll be more alert to the impending hazards. You’ll also be able to increase your awareness of moving vehicles; this will prevent you from stepping into the path of one of these vehicles.

A second important item to remember is that pedestrians should yield the right of way or make sure that the vehicle has yielded to them. Never assume that the operator has seen you and recognized your intention to step into the truck path.

A final area of pedestrian responsibility is making sure that the operator is not distracted. Horseplay has no place in the work environment; this includes jumping on a lift truck just for the ride.

Pedestrians play an important role in preventing industrial accidents and injuries relating to equipment. If you see equipment being operated thoughtlessly, endangering employees or property, report the mishandling to your supervisor. After all, your health and well-being, and your coworkers’, is at stake.