Forklift Safety

Forklifts, properly known as industrial trucks, are used to lift and transport heavy objects. They include pedestrian-controlled trucks, ride-on trucks, rough terrain trucks and a number of specialized industrial trucks – but not cranes.

Through agreed safe systems of work, training, supervision and consultation between employers, employees and safety and health representatives, employers and employees can ensure a safe and productive workplace.

Training – the Key to Safety
UN TRAINED OPERATORS ARE NOT TO USE FORKLIFTS.

Training is essential to safety on forklifts. They are specialized machines and require specialized training.

Systems of Work
All employers should completely revise or review their systems of work in regard to forklift operation. While training of operators is very important, it becomes considerably less effective when it is not integrated with proper systems of work. Consideration should be given to:

- limiting the speed of forklifts;
- having marked areas for walkways; and
- separating pedestrian traffic from industrial equipment.

Safe Operation of Forklifts
UN DGOING A TRAINING COURSE IS THE ONLY WAY TO LEARN SAFE OPERATING PROCEDURES FOR FORKLIFTS.

THE FOLLOWING IS A SUMMARY OF GENERAL INFORMATION AND IS NOT TO BE USED AS AN INSTRUCTION MANUAL, OR A SUBSTITUTE FOR TRAINING.

Employers shall ensure that only trained operators use forklifts, and are properly instructed and supervised.

Maintenance
The only people involved in fuel handling and storage, battery charging and changing and vehicle maintenance should be those trained and authorized to do this work. Forklifts should be maintained in good condition and repair. If the fault or condition results in the forklift being dangerous to operate, it must not be used until the problem is rectified.

Labels and Signs
Controls must be labeled and operators must be familiar with load handling symbols.

Guards
Forklifts should have overhead guards (fall-on protection), which should not prevent the operator from having adequate visibility and must conform to OSHA standards, including tests designed to ensure the strength of guards. Guards should be fitted to protect employees from hot parts, moving parts and exposed wheels.

Our safety evaluations, reports and recommendations are made solely to assist your organization in reducing hazards and the potential of hazards and accidents. These recommendations were developed from conditions observed and information provided at the time of our visit. They do not attempt to identify every possible loss potential, hazard or risk, nor do they guarantee that workplace accidents will be prevented. These safety evaluations, reports and recommendations are not a substitute for ongoing, well-researched internal safety and risk management programs. This report does not warrant that the property inspected and its operations are compliant with any law, rule or regulation.

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Work Platform
Where other means of lifting workers are impractical, work platforms may be used, but should conform to applicable regulations.

Ramps
If a mobile ramp is supplied for use by a forklift, it shall be ensured the ramp:
- Is wide and strong enough;
- Is maintained in good condition;
- Has good traction even in wet weather;
- Has side rails to prevent wheels slipping off;
- Is fixed at the top to prevent dislodgment;
- Allows smooth weight transfer on and off the ramp;
- Has a gradient at an angle recommended for safe operation of the forklift being used; and
- Is used only by adequately trained operators familiar with the vehicle.

Hazardous Areas
A hazard may exist for forklifts in certain applications, such as with slippery floors, potentially explosive (dust or gas) or toxic atmospheres, restricted ventilation and poor visibility. Gas, petrol or diesel operated forklifts should not be used in areas of restricted ventilation, where exhaust gases may create a dangerous condition by reducing oxygen levels. The employer is responsible for having any hazardous areas classified with the appropriate statutory authority. Only forklifts that can safely operate in the hazardous area can be used, and must be marked accordingly.

Forklift Operating Procedures for Employees
Pre-Operating Check
Prior to use of a forklift, the following procedure should be followed:
- Check lifting capacity of forklift;
- Inspect lift and tilt mechanisms;
- Inspect tires for wear and inflation;
- Inspect liquid levels (battery, hydraulic oil, engine oil, transmission oil, brake fluid, cooling water and fuel); and
- Ensure brakes, steering, controls, lights and warning devices operate effectively.

Faults, Maintenance and Accidents
Any faults or safety problems must be reported immediately. Any alterations or adjustments to the forklift should not be made unless authorized. Report all accidents.

Longitudinal Instability
The forklift will become unstable and liable to tip forward if the forklift is overloaded. Check the load capacity of the forklift being used. The load should always be facing uphill. Make sure the load is back on the heel of the forks. When removing an object from a stack, as soon as it is clear of the stack lower it to traveling height (as low as possible), and do not travel with load extended at height. Do not add counterweights to enable forklifts to lift heavier weights than they are designed to.
Lateral Instability
The forklift should not be driven across an incline. It should be driven up and down gradients slowly and at all times the load should be kept facing upwards. An unladen, counterbalanced forklift should not be driven with the forks facing down the gradient, except where it has been designed to operate the opposite way. Many forklifts are more unstable when unloaded. The forklift should be kept level, and uneven driving surfaces, dips and pot-holes avoided. The load should be kept as low as possible when moving. Avoid sharp turns, or turns at high speed. If the forklift rolls over, DO NOT ATTEMPT TO JUMP CLEAR. STAY WITH THE FORKLIFT.

A large proportion of serious injuries and the majority of deaths associated with forklifts are from forklift tipovers.

When a forklift begins to roll over, its initial momentum is slow, giving the mistaken impression to the operator that there is time to abandon the vehicle. When the center of gravity passes the wheel the roll over rapidly accelerates. An operator who is attempting to abandon the vehicle can be pinned or crushed by the overhead guard.

A device is required to contain the operator within the vehicle, supporting the top half of the body and waist with a lap belt and seat restraint.

Moving Loads
Other people should be kept clear when moving and loading objects. The load should be made secure before carrying it. Sudden stops and starts should be avoided.

Body Position
No part of the operator’s body should be placed outside the operator’s compartment or past the overhead protection. Remain seated at all times. Keep clear of the lifting mechanism at all times.

Attachments
Make sure the attachment used is appropriate for the workplace and the job (e.g. forks, jib, clamp, platform). A load should not be dragged or slung from the forks. Damaged pallets, bins or containers that may collapse should not be used.

NEVER USE A FORKLIFT FOR A JOB IT IS NOT DESIGNED TO DO.

People on Forklifts
People must not be allowed to ride on the forklift unless there is a separate seat. People must not be lifted on the forks or a pallet. Use a proper work platform only.

Vision
Operators should keep a careful watch on surroundings while working or driving. They should be aware of doorways, passages or pathways where pedestrians or vehicles may suddenly appear. If the load obscures forward vision, the forklift should be driven in reverse (except up ramps). Warning light should be kept flashing when using the forklift. The warning device should be sounded when going through doorways, around blind corners or when starting to reverse.

Ramps
Ramps should not be used unless the operator is trained in their use. Have dual brake pedals locked together for even braking.