

Safety Facts: Forklift Operation*



Forklifts are an under rated hazard that exist in most food processing and manufacturing companies. The reason that we have specific regulations for forklift training and certification is that forklifts have caused more fatalities than all other mobile equipment combined. The reason for the complacency around forklifts is that they are compact and their rear wheel steering make them very maneuverable giving them the feeling of driving a go cart. Unfortunately, the combination of their high lifting capacity and tight turning ability makes them extremely unstable. Even a small counterbalanced forklift will have a counterweight that weighs several tones.

What Training Is Required for Forklift Operation?

Forklift operators must receive adequate training and instruction before operating a forklift. This instruction must include competency training by a certified forklift instructor. Operators must also demonstrate that can they conduct a full pre-shift inspection of their equipment to ensure that it is safe operating condition prior to use, and know to report any defects immediately. Certified operators must also receive regular refresher training to maintain their certification. Operators must also operate the equipment safely, maintain full control of the equipment and comply with laws governing the operation of equipment. (Part 16 OHSR)

Mechanism of Injury

- Tip over while operating due to improper operation, speed, loading or weight distribution.

- Forklift—pedestrian contact. This is the second most common cause of fatalities associated with forklift operation.
- Loss of load control, when the operator loses control of the load and it falls off the forks. This can lead to the load falling on the falling object protection structure (FOPS) above the operator, falling onto nearby workers or pedestrians, or possibly tip over due to weight shift.

Associated Risks

- Events that cause tip over happen unexpectedly and this is why tip over is the number one cause of fatalities associated with forklift operation. In order to prevent this, the operator must always be restrained inside the operating cab to prevent being crushed by the weight of the forklift in cases of tip over.
- Operators must ensure they have good visibility of their travel path in whichever direction they are traveling. Pedestrians must understand that forklift operators have limited fields of vision and must be vigilant whenever in a mobile equipment operating area and wear the required Hi Vis apparel. It is important to follow certified operator procedures such as travelling with the forks close to the ground as these will reduce severity of injuries to people should contact occur with people walking, or inside other mobile equipment.
- Cutting blades, bits, and discs inspected and maintained on regular basis—damaged or dull ones are removed or sharpened.

Preventative Next Steps

- Do not allow workers to operate forklifts unless qualified or are under the supervision of a qualified instructor.
- Ensure that forklifts are maintained in good working order and that safety related items are repaired immediately.
- Do not allow horseplay
- Ensure the forklifts are safe to operate, and that all safety features are operating by conducting pre-use inspections.
- Ensure that forklifts have the rated capacity for the loads being moved.
- Ensure that all pedestrians wear the required HI Vis apparel when in a mobile equipment area.
- Separate pedestrians from mobile equipment traffic by implementing designated walkways wherever possible
- Install parabolic mirrors to allow viewing around blind corners
- Ensure that horn warnings are used when approaching blind corners
- Ensure that operators drive at a safe speed that allows them to be able to stop should someone step into their path of travel.



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