



Weekly Safety Meeting

Safely Using a Forklift

OSHA's Powered Industrial Truck (PIT) Standard provides specific instructions that operators should always follow while using a PIT. Before we look at some of these, let's consider the surfaces over which a forklift may travel.

Surface Condition

The surface conditions matter when it comes to forklift operation because the surface can cause serious safety problems. Loose objects and bumps where depressions can cause the operator to lose control of steering can cause an unplanned stop, or even cause losing the load entirely. Uneven surfaces may cause a wheel to get stuck or sink and destabilize the load and the forklift.

Traveling

The number one basic rule while operating a forklift is to always maintain control while traveling. As such there are a number of "do"s and "don't"s operators must follow in order to safely operate a forklift.

The operator should never start the forklift or attempt to operate the controls while standing beside the forklift, allow passengers on the forklift unless the forklift is designed for carrying a passenger, or put any part of their body between the uprights of the mast or, when traveling, outside of the forklift frame. The operator should not pass a forklift traveling in the same direction if it is at a blind spot, intersection, or other dangerous locations, never drive the forklift up to anyone in front of a bench or other fixed object, and never allow anyone to walk or stand under the forks of the forklift regardless of whether the forks have a load on them or not. The operator should never engage in horseplay or stunt driving.

The forklift operator should only operate the forklift while in the forklift seat or the operator's station. The operator should always look in the direction of travel and keep a clear view of the travel path and should travel in reverse if the load blocks the view of the operator. Operators should keep a distance of at least three forklift lengths between themselves and any forklift traveling in front of them and should always check to ensure there is adequate clearance for the forklift and load to pass under support beams, lights, sprinklers, pipes, and other overhead objects.

Loading and Unloading the Forklift

Dangerous and even deadly incidences can occur during the placement or retrieval of a load. To prevent such occurrences, employers should ensure operators practice the following:

The operator should check the load for stability, before picking it up, by considering positioning of parts of the load that may move, slide, or fall during transit. Secure the load as necessary.

The operator should consider the dimensions and weight of the load, checking that the load fits within the capacity of the PIT, factoring in the highest elevation and extension to be used. If the load does not fit the capacity of the PIT, the operator may need to break the load into smaller parts. Forks should be placed squarely into the load, spread to keep the load balanced, and driven all the way under the load. The mast should be tilted backward slightly to stabilize the load and lift.

Checking the Destination

The operator should check the destination before placing the load. Consider the destination – is it a flat surface, stable? Will the load rock, tilt, or lean? Consider the weight - never place heavy loads on top of light loads. Consider stacking – observe maximum stacking quantities and orientation, know the load-bearing capacity of the rack or storage loft. Are the wooden stringers or decking laid between front and rear rack beams in good condition and capable of supporting the current load and any additional load? Consider the rack condition – if rack legs or support member are bent or disconnected, do not use. Are the racks secured to the floor or other adjacent structures? Report damage or repair or replace before loading. And finally, consider the location of racks – if racks are arranged back-to-back with stock behind the location where an operator's load will be placed, a spotter should be used to help control access while placing the load.

Placing the Load at its Destination

The forklift operator should move squarely into position in front of the rack or stack where the load will be placed. When the operator is ready to place the load, tilt the mast to level. Only tilt forward when the load is over the spot where it will be placed. Lower the forks and back away. The operator should visually verify that the load is stable.

Forklift training is crucial to the safety of yourself and others, so maintain yours up to date. Forklift refresher training is required every 3 years, or sooner if you have an accident, bad evaluation, unsafe driving, a change of type of forklift, or change in workplace conditions.

FORKLIFT OPERATION IS SERIOUS BUSINESS!

