

Raise Your Lift Truck Safety Habits

Increase your lift truck safety in the workplace beyond the OSHA standards. By Maria Hoffman

Accidents in the workplace can pose a serious threat to both workers and the company, especially when working with machinery such as lift trucks. It is important to understand where common accidents occur in order to be able to prevent them. The industry experts expressed their concern about promoting a safer environment for their employees and for themselves. Practicing safe behavior at work leads to an overall improved work flow among workers.

Common Accidents and how to Prevent Them

There are numerous types of lift truck related accidents that can occur at the workplace that include collisions, tip-over's and off dock incidents.

1. Collisions. Collisions can occur when either hitting fixed objects or non-fixed objects. These fixed objects can include walls, ceiling support beams, doorframes and more. Common accidents caused by hitting into non-fixed objects include hitting into other lift trucks, mobile machinery, and unfortunately pedestrians in the facility.

"The biggest reason for collisions is inattention," says Ron Brewer, manager of Crown's operator training program, Munich, Germany. "Operators are getting into the habit of not looking before they backup, and not looking before they travel."

Developing safety habits is the key to avoiding collisions with both fixed and non-fixed objects. A driver should always maintain a proper speed when driving a lift truck to avoid a potential danger. Training your supervisors and your pedestrians are equally as important. "Pedestrian hits occur because they don't know the communications," says Brewer. Proper training will assist in putting traffic control into effect and promoting a safer work environment.

2. Tip-over's. Tip-over's, another common accident, can occur when the mast of the lift truck is high up in the air with the load, which causes it to be top heavy. When the lift



TRAINING: Proper operator training is mandatory in order to ensure safety in the workplace.

truck starts to turn it experiences an inertial tip-over. The raised mast of the lift truck can bump into the top of a doorframe, which can result in another tip-over. Overloading the lift truck is another cause of tip-over's.

To avoid tip-over's the driver must understand the lift trucks center of gravity. The driver should make sure the load is stable by not overloading the mast and keeping the mast lowered when traveling.

Some drivers may find it difficult to identify the truck's center of gravity. Scott McLeod, president of Fleetman Consulting Inc., British Columbia Canada, believes each lift truck should be equipped with a fork lift scale in order to accurately measure the weight of the load. "As it stands today, this feature is an option but it should be standard equipment and offered by every lift truck manufacturer," he says.

3. Off Dock Incidents. "Off docks are way too common," says Brewer. Off dock accidents occur when the lift truck enters inside of a truck that ultimately moves away from the dock door causing the lift truck to fall out of the truck. This can be caused if the trailer isn't hooked up to the dock properly,

and the movement from the lift truck going in and out can lead to the truck idling away.

Preventing off dock incidents should be taken very seriously. The truck driver should always remember to utilize wheel chocks, which are wedge shaped blocks that are placed in front of the rear tires. This helps to prevent the truck from moving away from the dock. The dock should be well-lit in order to ensure the safety of the workers.

Other forms of protecting lift truck drivers would be to implement a safety barrier that prevents off dock incidents from occurring. A safety barrier protects employees, their cargo and reduces damage to dock doors, which in the long run saves you money while preventing potentially serious injuries.

Proper Training & Going Beyond OSHA Standards

Proper operator training is mandatory in order to ensure safety in the workplace. "The most critical approach to reducing the likelihood of accidents involving lift trucks in the workplace is for employers to ensure that each powered industrial lift truck operator

is competent to operate a powered industrial truck safely by successfully completing a training and evaluation program as mandated by OSHA," says Martin Boyd, vice president of marketing, product planning & training of Toyota Material Handling, Irvine, CA.

OSHA standards require all employers evaluate their lift truck employees every three years, and if they observe unsafe behavior or the evaluation reveals an issue, they are required to get retraining. During this training, each employee will learn how to properly use and maintain a truck lift in order to prevent an accident from occurring. This type of training includes many forms of instruction including: formal instruction through lectures and discussions. This classroom atmosphere will help employees get an overall knowledge about how to operate a lift truck, but lectures and discussions aren't enough. Practical training, which involves a hands-on experience, will also be included in the training program.

"We train to reinforce specific behaviors, which reduce the risks of accidents," says Rick Grossert, manager, operator & technical training at Nissan Forklift, Marengo, IL.

Although training is an extremely vital step for preventing accidents, some experts feel that standard OSHA training isn't enough. "With many operators, there is a false sense

KEY TIPS TO IMPROVE LIFT TRUCK SAFETY

Familiarize yourself with the equipment and your surroundings:

- Make sure the load is stable and safely arranged on the forks.
- Cross railroad tracks diagonally when possible.
- Slow down on wet or slippery surfaces.
- Slow down to make turns.
- Avoid driving over loose objects or on surfaces with ruts and holes.

Always remember to make sure:

- The horn is working properly.
- There aren't any hydraulic leaks in the mast or elsewhere.
- The lights are operating properly at night or in dark conditions.
- The brakes are working reliably.
- The steering is responsive.



Source: Washington State Department of Labor & Industries

of security that comes with successfully completing an operator training program and if left unaddressed, there may be fatal consequences," says Fleetman's McLeod.

McLeod, like many other experts, believe certain technological lift truck equipment should be made mandatory instead of optional, such as a lift truck scale. Implementing a mandatory scale will help assist employees to prevent overloading from occurring.

"The lift truck should be made to be more responsible for the protection of each and

every operator and if this was the case, there would be less injuries and less fatalities in the workplace today," says McLeod. Other ways to ensure safety while using a lift truck is to make sure proper maintenance and inspections are completed frequently to ensure the lift truck is up to par.

"The best piece of safety equipment on any powered industrial truck is a well-trained operator," concludes Paul Fiala, sales training manager at Mitsubishi Caterpillar Forklift America Inc., Houston. ✚

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