



FORKLIFT DANGERS

Forklifts are not only among the most common types of motorized equipment, they are also the cause of some of the most serious workplace accidents. Forklift safety is a major concern in a large majority of workplaces. That's because most industrial facilities use forklifts, and more than 20,000 injuries related to forklifts occur each year. More than a few forklift accidents result in the death of the operator or another employee.

DEADLY DANGER #1 - FORKLIFT TURNS

Close to one out of every four fatalities occurs when a forklift tips over. Forklifts can easily tip if they are overloaded, if the load is not well balanced, or if they travel with the forks too high.

⊕ HOW IT CAN HAPPEN: A forklift operator was killed when his forklift overturned when he was turning while backing down an incline. Another operator was fatally injured when his forklift fell off a loading dock and pinned him under the overhead guard. Neither worker was wearing a seat belt.

⊕ HOW TO PREVENT THESE ACCIDENTS: Operators should be required to wear seat belts and must be trained to:

- Make sure the load is stable and safely arranged on the forks.
- Avoid tilting the forks forward except when picking up or depositing a load. tilt the load backward only enough to stabilize the load.
- On grades, tilt the load back and raise it only as far as needed to clear the road surface.
- Use extreme caution on grades or ramps.
- Keep the load uphill when going up or down an incline.
- Avoid raising or lowering the forks while the forklift is moving.
- Slow down to make turns and avoid attempting sharp turns.
- Make sure that there is room for the rear end to swing when making turns.
- Handle asymmetrical loads when their work includes this activity.
- Slow down on wet or slippery surfaces.



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DEADLY DANGER #2 - NEARBY WORKER STRUCK BY FORKLIFT

Forklifts and pedestrians can often be a deadly mix.

⦿ **How it can happen:** A punch press operator at a computer components manufacturer was fatally injured when a forklift, traveling in reverse at high speed toward the victim’s workstation, struck a metal scrap bin, which propelled it toward the workstation where it struck and crushed the victim against the press.

⦿ **How to prevent these accidents:** You should:

- Separate forklift traffic and other workers where possible.
- Limit some aisles to workers on foot only or forklifts only.
- Restrict the use of forklifts near time clocks, break rooms, cafeterias, and main exits, particularly when the flow of workers on foot is at a peak (such as at the end of a shift or during breaks).
- Ensure that workplace safety inspections are routinely conducted by a person who can identify hazards and conditions that are dangerous to workers.
- Install workstations, control panels, and equipment away from aisles when possible. Otherwise, install physical barriers to ensure that workstations are protected.
- Avoid locating bins, racks, or other materials at corners, inter-sections, or other locations that obstruct the view of operators or workers at workstations.
- Enforce safe driving practices such as obeying speed limits, stop-ping at stop signs, and slowing down and blowing the horn at intersections.
- Evaluate intersections and other blind corners to determine whether overhead dome mirrors could improve the visibility of forklift operators or workers on foot.
- Operators should obey speed limits, watch for pedestrians, sound horns when vision is obstructed, and avoid driving close to employees working nearby or their workstations.

Other workers should:

- Be aware of forklift traffic areas, avoid them if possible, and keep a sharp eye out if they are walking in a forklift lane.

- Be ready to move quickly if they hear a warning horn or backup signal.
- Not listen to their iPod® or other audio devices requiring earpieces if they are walking in a forklift-traffic area.
- Move out of the way quickly if they observe a forklift that looks unstable or is not operating in a safe manner.

DEADLY DANGER #3 - VICTIM CRUSHED BY FORKLIFT

Sixteen percent of forklift fatalities occur when victims are crushed by the vehicle.

⦿ **How it can happen:** An electric line technician was crushed to death after falling from and being run over by a forklift. The technician was riding on the forks.

⦿ **How to prevent these accidents:** Operators should:

- Never allow passengers to ride on forklift trucks unless a seat is provided.
- Make sure authorized passengers are seated and using seat belts.
- Never allow workers to ride on the forks.
- Remain inside the operator’s compartment while using a forklift and wear a seat belt.
- Always check the route for any hazards, especially if operating in an unfamiliar location.

DEADLY DANGER #4 - FALLS FROM FORKLIFTS

It is not always the case that a victim is crushed following a fall from a forklift. The fall alone may be fatal. Of fatal forklift accidents, 9 percent are the result of falls.

⦿ **How it can happen:** An assistant warehouse manager was fatally injured while working with a forklift operator to pull tires from a storage rack. The two workers had placed a wooden pallet on the forks of the forklift, and the victim then stood on the pallet. The operator raised the forks and victim above a concrete floor to the top of the storage rack. When the pallet became unstable, the victim lost his balance and fell, striking his head on the floor.



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- **How to prevent these accidents:** Make sure operators:
 - Use only an approved lifting cage and adhere to general safety practices for elevating personnel with a forklift.
 - Always secure the platform to the lifting carriage or forks.
 - Provide means for personnel on the platform to shut power off to the truck whenever the truck is equipped with vertical-only or vertical and horizontal controls for lifting personnel.
 - Never use a forklift to elevate workers who are standing on the forks.
 - Never elevate a worker on a platform unless the vehicle is directly below the work area.
 - Use restraining means such as rails, chains, or a body belt with a lanyard or deceleration device for the person(s) on the platform.
 - Never drive to another location with the work platform elevated.

discovered by proper inspection. The forklift was still in operation and had not been removed from service pending repairs.

THOUGHT OF THE DAY

A near miss reported today is the accident that may not happen tomorrow.

DEADLY DANGER #5 - FAILURE TO INSPECT OR PERFORM PROPER MAINTENANCE

As with all equipment, forklifts must be inspected regularly and properly maintained.

- **How it can happen:** An employee was killed while using a forklift to unload steel tubing from a flatbed trailer. As he turned the forklift on a slight grade behind the trailer, the forklift began to tip over on its side. The worker jumped from the forklift, and his head and neck were pinned to the concrete driveway under the falling forklift. An inspection of the forklift revealed that the right-side rear axle stop was damaged before the incident and was not restricting the lateral sway of the forklift when it turned. Also, slack in the steering mechanism required the operator to turn the steering wheel slightly more than half a revolution before the wheels started to turn. The forklift was not equipped with a seat belt.
- **How to prevent these accidents:** Notice that, in this case, the forklift operator was not using a seat belt (In fact, the forklift did not have one.), so the immediate cause of death was the tip over and the operator’s attempt to jump free.

However, the underlying cause was the fact that the forklift had defects that had not been



