Appearances Can Be Deceiving

A 17-year old worker died just one hour into his new job after becoming pinned under a forklift. He hadn’t received any job orientation or training.

At first glance it appears the company had little regard for the safety of its employees. But things aren’t always as they appear.

What happened:

A teenage Hispanic male had just been hired at a commercial grain and hay feed store to haul bags to customers’ vehicles.

Minutes into his job, the youth was told to “hang loose” and wait for the manager to go to the bank.

Perhaps anxious to prove his enthusiasm for the job, he sprang into action after overhearing a customer ordering three bales of hay.

The youth jumped onto a forklift, whose keys were in its ignition, and drove to where the bales were stored. While backing the forklift, the worker ran over a gutter, causing the lift truck to tip and crush him.

The manager’s story:

The store manager told investigators that upon his return from the bank he intended to take the young worker through his orientation process, and he would have been warned to not operate the forklift.

The company’s mistake was to allow the forklift’s keys to be kept in its ignition. Had the new worker had to ask for them, likely he would have been denied access to the forklift.

Investigators made the following recommendations:

- Employees younger than 18 should not operate power-driven machinery.

- Equipment that is not to be operated by workers younger than 18 should be identified and labeled.
- New employees must undertake a job orientation process and receive safety training before starting a job.