Forklift Safety Involves Everyone!

Forklift safety – what does it have to do with you?

Forklifts are a common sight in most plant warehouses, or, anyone who shops at a warehouse store or a building supply center also risks an encounter with one.

Unsuspecting workers have been run over, innocent bystanders have been pinned by the forks, elevated loads have fallen onto people, and even unauthorized hitchhikers have fallen off and been crushed under the wheels.

The way to protect yourself is to understand how a forklift works, and to be alert to its dangers:

- Don’t assume the driver sees you.
- Stay out of restricted areas reserved for forklift traffic.
- Never hitch a ride on a forklift. It is not made to carry passengers.
- Don’t use the forklift as an elevator to do work at heights.
- Never go near or step under an elevated load on a forklift – these loads can fall!
- Understand that the forklift, which usually has rear-wheel steering, will swing out at the rear end when turning.
- Keep clear of all of the parts of a forklift, including the forks and the wheels, which can catch you or crush you.
- Never drive a forklift unless you are qualified to do so. Fatalities have occurred when unqualified personnel have “borrowed” a forklift for just a few minutes.
- Just because you can drive a car doesn’t mean that you can safely operate a forklift! A forklift operates much differently from a car – when was the last time you drove a car with rear-wheel steering, backwards down a narrow aisle? Or with a large load in front of you blocking your vision? It can also flip easily in a sharp turn and it is counterweighted at the rear to balance the weight of the

load. Mandatory training is required in many parts of the country before you can even sit in the driver’s seat. Check with your supervisor.

These are only some of the safety rules which will be followed by a properly trained forklift operator:

- Drivers must observe all the speed limits and traffic signs, remembering to stop at all intersections.
- The driver must watch out for potholes and cluttered floors, slippery surfaces, narrow passages, low clearances, overhead wiring, pipes, dock edges and railroad crossings. He must also avoid quick turns and sudden stops.
- The safely trained driver has to know how to handle slopes. When the truck is loaded, the load has to be on the upgrade. The driver has remember to back down slopes and go forward up slopes with a load. When the forklift is unloaded, it has to travel with the forks downgrade.
- The driver must make sure the load is stable and evenly distributed before attempting to move it.
- The driver must remember to keep his arms, hands and legs within the operator’s cage, and he must never reach through or put his head through the uprights.

On top of all this, the forklift operator has to watch out for you – the pedestrian. Please don’t make the job any tougher than it already is by thinking that you have nothing to do with forklift safety!