Forklifts are Dangerous Animals: Approach with Caution

What’s at Stake

Imagine a vehicle that weighs twice as much as your family car, can’t stop nearly as quickly and is operated by a person who may not see you.

We’re talking about forklifts, which are a vital part of work operations in a variety of workplaces around the world. In North America alone there are close to one million forklifts being used.

What’s the Danger

Every year, more than 100 North American workers die in forklift-related incidents and another 20,000 are injured.

Example

A maintenance welder died when he was run over and crushed by a forklift. The welder and a co-worker had been riding in an electric cart when they came across a forklift approaching from the opposite direction.

At the last second, the forklift turned left in front of their cart, throwing both workers from it. The co-worker was thrown clear, but the victim was fatally crushed.

How to Protect Yourself

The position of a forklift’s lifting mechanism and forks compromises the operator’s view, making it hard to see other workers in the vicinity.

If you’re not thinking about where you are walking, it’s incredibly easy to find yourself in the path of a forklift whose operator either might not see you or cannot stop in time.

Hazards associated with working around forklifts include these:

- You could be run over by a forklift whose operator has not seen you.
- You could be crushed between a passing forklift and equipment or walls.
- A forklift could drop its load into your path.
- A forklift could bump into racking, causing it to collapse or knock loose heavy materials onto you.
- A forklift could fall off a loading dock or ramp and land on you.
- A forklift being operated in a poorly ventilated area could cause you to suffer carbon monoxide poisoning.

When working around forklifts, you must take several precautions. First, ensure you are wearing a highly visible safety vest, to make yourself stand out to forklift operators.

Never assume that a forklift operator has seen you. Unless you make eye contact and get an operator’s acknowledgement, stay well away from the lift truck.

Stick to designated walkways and crosswalks designed to separate forklifts and pedestrians.

Here are some additional tips for working safely around forklifts:

- Never stand near or under a forklift’s forks. A load that hasn’t been properly secured may suddenly fall onto you.
- Know that the rear end of a forklift can quickly swing out and hit workers.
- Keep focused and always check for forklifts before stepping out of an aisle or across a pathway.

Final Word

No worker can afford to be complacent while working near operating forklifts. You need to stay alert to avoid becoming caught between a forklift and a hard place.