Powered Industrial Trucks – Pre-Operation Checks Meeting Kit

WHAT'S AT STAKE

Operating a Powered Industrial Truck (PIT), such as a forklift, involves significant risks if the machinery isn't functioning correctly. Pre-operation checks are therefore crucial for ensuring the safety of the operator and those nearby. Neglecting these checks can lead to severe consequences, including accidents resulting in serious injuries or even fatalities. Imagine the danger of operating a forklift with faulty brakes, worn tires compromising stability, a non-functioning horn unable to warn pedestrians, or a lifting mechanism prone to dropping loads. These checks are a proactive measure to identify potential mechanical issues before operation begins.

WHAT'S THE DANGER

Risk of Mechanical Failure During Operation

Operating a Powered Industrial Truck (PIT) without conducting thorough pre-operation checks significantly increases the risk of mechanical failure while the truck is in use. This could manifest in various critical systems. For instance, undetected faulty brakes could fail entirely when needed most, leading to collisions. Similarly, hydraulic leaks, if not identified beforehand, could worsen during operation, causing a loss of lifting or tilting control, potentially dropping loads or making the truck unstable. Steering malfunctions that weren't caught in a pre-check could suddenly make the PIT difficult or impossible to control, especially in tight spaces or at higher speeds.

Increased Likelihood of Accidents and Injuries

When mechanical failures occur during operation due to a lack of pre-operation checks, the likelihood of accidents and subsequent injuries rises dramatically. A PIT that cannot brake effectively poses a direct threat to pedestrians and other workers in the area. Unstable steering can lead to collisions with racking, machinery, or even other PITs. Dropped loads from a malfunctioning lifting mechanism can cause serious injuries to anyone underneath or nearby. Furthermore, undetected issues like worn tires or uneven lifting can contribute to tip-overs, which are a leading cause of fatalities involving PITs.

Failure of Safety Systems

Pre-operation checks also ensure that critical safety systems on the PIT are functioning correctly. A non-operational horn means the operator cannot effectively warn pedestrians of the truck's presence. Damaged or non-functioning lights and signals reduce visibility, especially in low-light conditions or busy areas, increasing the risk of collisions. If safety restraints, like seatbelts or operator presence systems, are not checked and are faulty, they won't provide adequate protection in the event of an accident. Neglecting these checks means operating a PIT without the assurance that its built-in safety features will work when needed most.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

To protect yourself when operating Powered Industrial Trucks (PITs), the most critical step is to always perform a thorough pre-operation check before each shift or use. This proactive measure allows you to identify potential safety hazards and mechanical issues before they can lead to accidents.

Conduct a Comprehensive Pre-Operation Check

Familiarize yourself with the specific pre-operation inspection requirements for the make and model of the PIT you will be using. The manual will outline exactly what needs to be checked.

Visual Inspection (Walk-Around):

- **Overall Condition:** Look for any obvious damage, loose parts, leaks (hydraulic fluid, fuel, battery acid), or anything that appears out of the ordinary.
- **Tires/Wheels:** Check tire pressure (if pneumatic), look for cuts, gouges, or excessive wear. Ensure wheel nuts are tight.
- **Forks/Attachments:** Inspect forks for bends, cracks, or wear. 1 Ensure they are properly secured. Check the condition and operation of any attachments.
- **Overhead Guard/Operator Restraints:** Ensure the overhead guard is securely in place and undamaged. Check the condition and functionality of seatbelts or other operator restraints.
- **Lights and Signals:** Test all lights (headlights, taillights, warning lights) and audible signals (horn, backup alarm) to ensure they are working correctly.
- **Hydraulic System:** Check hydraulic fluid levels. Inspect hoses and fittings for leaks or damage.
- **Battery/Power Source:** For electric PITs, check the battery charge level and look for any damage or leaks. For internal combustion PITs, check fuel and other fluid levels.
- **Brakes:** Test the service and parking brakes to ensure they are functioning effectively.
- **Steering:** Check for excessive play or unusual noises in the steering system.
- **Controls:** Ensure all operating controls (lift, tilt, travel) function smoothly and correctly.

Operational Checks (Once Seated):

Once seated, conduct operational checks in a safe area. Test all controls: lift, lower, tilt, forward, and backward movement, ensuring smooth and correct function. Listen for unusual noises. Verify the horn and warning lights are working. At low speed, check the service and parking brakes for effectiveness. These immediate checks after the visual inspection provide a crucial second layer of safety before operating the PIT.

FINAL WORD

When it comes to operating Powered Industrial Trucks, always remember that a comprehensive pre-operation check is non-negotiable. It’s your first and most vital step in ensuring a safe work environment.