Using a Forklift Meeting Kit

In any workplace that involves loading, unloading, and stacking of large pallets or other heavy materials, the forklift is a common tool. Each day, operators of these vehicles perform a balancing act—moving product from one location to another in both a safe and efficient manner.

However, that doesn’t always happen. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) estimates more than 95,000 people are injured and at least 100 die in forklift accidents each year. Most of these are caused by the forklift tipping over.

FORKLIFT SAFETY MEASURES FOR EMPLOYEES

1. **Get Forklift Certification:** It is recommended that only those who have been trained and licensed in accordance with OSHA standards be responsible for operating a forklift. Employers should evaluate their employees’ performance at least once every three years and supplement training with lectures, videos, software training, and demonstrations.

1. **Wear Proper Clothing:** Forklift operators should be dressed with the appropriate safety equipment, including safety shoes, hard-hats, and a high-visibility jacket. Make sure to tuck away loose clothing to prevent it from getting caught on the forklift.

1. **Know the Forklift Class:** There are many different forklift types and classifications. Since each type has its own structure, weight limit, traveling speed, turning radius, and usage, it’s important to know your equipment in order to follow the best safety practices.

1. **Inspect the Equipment Daily:** Forklifts should be thoroughly inspected before every use. Daily checks with the shift supervisor are recommended to identify and log any problems or defects.

- Test operating controls such as brakes, lights, horn, and steering wheel
- Check mast and overhead guard for damage
- Examine tire and fluid levels (hydraulic, brake, engine, fuel, and coolant)
- Check for water, oil, or radiator leaks
- Ensure the forks are in good condition (e.g. straight, no cracks, no distortion)
- Look for potential hazards

1. **Maintain 360° Visibility:** Keep forks low to the ground to provide clear forward visibility. If the load restricts your visibility, operate the equipment in reverse. Always ensure you have a good view of the rack when you are positioning the load.

- Always make eye contact with pedestrians and other workers
- Always look in the direction of travel
- Use rear-view mirrors to boost visibility
- Use headlights if working at night, outdoors, or in areas where additional lighting is needed

1. **Implement a Floor Marking System:** Use yellow to mark physical hazards, such as areas prone to falling or stumbling, and red to delineate fire hazards, fire equipment and emergency switches. Place wayfinders and signs throughout the site to keep pedestrians away from forklift paths, lead forklifts along safe routes.

1. **Maintain Equipment Capacity:** Be aware of the capacity of your forklift and any attachments used. Avoid hauling weight that exceeds the counterweight of the forklift. Overloading a forklift can cause the rear wheels to rise off the ground and the whole machine to fall over, causing injury and damage.

1. **Never Carry Extra People:** Do not allow other workers to ride on the equipment with you unless a second seat is fitted into the forklift. If you need to lift a person, use only a secure work platform and cage.

1. **Pay Attention to the Forklift's Stability:** Each forklift has a center of gravity – the point where the weight has equal concentration – that it shares with the load it carries. Forklifts are built on a three-point suspension system, called the "stability triangle" that operators must stay within to prevent it from tipping over. The heavier the load, the further out the center of gravity is from the load center, decreasing your forklift's lifting capacity.

1. **Ensure Loads are Stable and Secure:** When placing loads on the loading dock, be sure to check them for balance. Travel with the load tilted backwards and keep forks as low as possible to increase the stability of the equipment, especially when navigating on ramps. Use ropes or bindings to secure stacks and heavy loads if necessary and make sure any pallets or skids used are the appropriate weight for the load.

1. **Move at the Appropriate Speed:** Drive your forklift within the designated speed limits. It's important to not stop, turn, change directions suddenly, or move fast when making sharp turns, as these actions can cause the forklift to tip over. If your forklift starts to dip, do not try to jump clear of the machine. Experts recommend staying in the vehicle, gripping the wheel, and bracing your feet.

1. **Maintain a Safe Operating Distance:** Be mindful of the surrounding equipment on the worksite. Do not operate a forklift in close proximity to other machinery unless absolutely necessary, and keep a safe distance to allow you room to stop safely and avoid other machines that are moving in an unpredictable manner.

1. **Avoid Hazardous Areas of the Equipment:** Avoid standing or walking under a load, lifting mechanism, or forklift attachment, as loads can fall off on anyone positioned below it.

1. **Refuel and Recharge the Forklift:** It's important to keep equipment fully charged and fueled. Be sure to recharge and refuel in specially designated locations, which are usually

well-ventilated and flame-free areas. Be diligent in switching off the equipment every time it’s being refueled.

1. **Park the Forklift at the End of the Shift:** At the end of the shift, be sure to always park the equipment in the designated and authorized areas. Fully lower the forks until they hit the floor, apply the parking brake, turn off the engine, and remove the key from the ignition.

FINAL WORD

Remind your employees that when used properly, forklifts provide a quick and easy method to move inventory—no matter how heavy—to the intended location. When not used properly, forklifts can lead to serious and even tragic accidents.