

Worker Crushed by Forklift

A 67-year old feed store employee died from multiple crushing injuries after he was pinned by a forklift that ran off a loading dock and overturned, pinning him to the ground.

The victim had dismounted from the forklift to remove an empty pallet that was jammed on the forks. He did not take the forklift out of gear, lower the forks or set the hand brake before he got off. As he tried to free the pallet, the forklift began to move in reverse. He ran after it to try to prevent it from rolling off the dock but as he attempted to climb on, a rear wheel rolled off the dock and the forklift overturned. He was crushed to death under an overhead guard.

When the victim was hired to drive a spreader truck 20 days earlier, he said he was a forklift operator, but the employer had no proof he had received any forklift training.

The company had a general written safety program and required all employees who operated forklifts to take a training and certification program at a local technical school. The victim was reportedly the only worker who had not taken the training. Managers said he had been told not to operate the forklift.

A National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health study of forklift accidents shows this incident is not uncommon: Of more than 1,000 fatalities studied, 22 percent resulted from forklifts that overturned. In 16 percent of the fatalities, the forklift crushed the operator.

NIOSH made these recommendations:

- Employers should have a comprehensive written safety program concerning the safe operation of fork lifts that includes worker training.
- Operator restraint systems should be used on all sit- down forklifts.
- Employers should have a vehicle inspection and maintenance program.

- Loading docks, aisles and other operating surfaces should be inspected regularly for defects that could cause accidents.
- All employees should understand that specific training and authorization is required to operate forklifts.

How does this apply to your work situation? Are you aware of your company's safety policies relating to forklifts and other in-plant vehicles?