Working With Forklifts

The forklift is an efficient tool. However, sometimes things go terribly wrong. Unsuspecting workers have been run over and bystanders have been pinned by the forks. Elevated loads have fallen and unauthorized hitchhikers have been crushed under wheels.

Remember, no one should stand or work under a suspended load.

Other important forklift safety procedures include the following:

- Drive only as fast as you can walk comfortably. Forklifts cannot travel safely at high speeds. Without loads, they are especially unstable.
- Keep the load low—While moving, forks should be positioned low, with the mast tilted slightly back.
- Maintain good visibility—If a load blocks forward vision, drive backwards.
- Back down slopes that have an incline greater than 10 percent. Make sure your backup alarm works properly.
- Never carry hitchhikers.
- Leave aisle room for others. Honk your horn before and while you enter an intersection.
- While parking on a hill, block the wheels, lower the forks and set the parking brake.

To avoid tipping over, don’t drive with tall or top-heavy loads, make sharp turns slowly, and always carry your load upgrade. Back down ramps, and never turn on slopes. Be alert for sudden bumps, chuck holes and other uneven ground. Watch the road and cross railroads diagonally.

Load and unload safely

When preparing to enter a pallet, keep the forks high enough and as wide apart as possible.

To capture a load, lift and tilt it back so it’s secure. Never exceed your forklift’s weight limits.

For minimum clearance, forks should clear the road by six to eight inches (15 to 20 centimeters) and be positioned higher for negotiating ramps and grades.

Plan your route for safety

Turn slowly into position. Raise the forks if necessary.

To stack on a rack, raise the load to the right height and position, tilt the load forward and lower the pallet onto the rack. Withdraw the forks slowly. Back out, looking over your shoulder.

To stack materials on a truck, make sure the dock plate and truck can’t move. Position the load, tilt it forward and release.

Everyone in an area near forklift traffic should:

- Never assume the forklift driver sees you.
- Understand that the forklift usually swings out at the rear end when turning.
- Keep clear of all the parts of a forklift.
- Never drive a forklift unless qualified to do so.

A forklift can be a big help or a source of disaster. Always treat it with respect.