



Safety Bulletin

Forklift Safety: Don't Blame the Driver

How facility operators can create a safer environment for forklifts, pedestrians, and drivers.

Environmental factors are often ignored: One percent of factory accidents involve forklift trucks, but forklift accidents produce ten percent of the physical injuries. That's an astonishing ratio, but not all that surprising given the nature of forklifts and the way they are utilized. Forklifts are dense, heavy-mass vehicles. When they collide with something – or someone – the results are devastating, even at low speeds.

Some leading types of lift truck accidents are:

- Workers struck by forklifts
- Loads are dropped onto employees
- Driver catches his body between the forklift and other objects
- The forklift is driven off the loading dock



Kind of a terrifying list, don't you think?

Most forklift accidents are blamed on operator error, but that is just partially true – and something of a cop-out.

Rough estimates say that a quarter of forklift accidents could be avoided by addressing environmental concerns. When you eliminate those, it helps you understand better when a driver is truly ineffective, or just hamstrung by the way your warehouse is set up. In other words, before you point the finger at the driver, take a look at your operation...

Here are some environmental factors that you can address to help reduce forklift accidents:

- **Poor facility lighting:** The acceptable level for general warehouse operations where large items are handled require only 10 to 20 horizontal foot-candles. Improved lighting can have a dramatic, positive impact on productivity in general, but safety in specific.
- **Plant is too noisy:** If your facility is too loud, not only does it mask the sound of an approaching forklift or of a pedestrian who has stopped to talk or pick items from racks, it can also degrade hearing over time. Utilize noise reducing equipment when possible.
- **Pedestrians aren't protected by design:** Create and enforce pedestrian crossing aisles and protective islands. When forklifts appear in unexpected places, the potential for accidents is multiplied. Traffic flow rules should be clear, visible, and routinely reinforced.
- **Are speed limits posted and enforced?** Often, the pressure of production pushes forklift speeds up. Safety experts recommend the suggested level for pedestrian areas is no more than 5 kilometres per hour.
- **Dangerous driving surfaces:** Poor ground surface can contribute to forklift accidents by making the vehicle less manoeuvrable and less stable. It's easier to drop the load when the driving surface is inadequate.
- **Are your aisles adequate?** It is vital that aisles are adequately wide for the lift truck to operate. It's doubly important if those same aisles are often walked by pedestrians. A driver who is trying not to hit racks, or who has to put his lift truck into tight spots, is one who is paying less attention to the people around him.

Information for this article was sourced from www.cisco-eagle.com. For further forklift safety information contact MLA Holdings on 131 652 or www.mlaholdings.com.au.