

Facility-Specific Training: Six Things You Need to Consider

Proper forklift operator training to meet OSHA requirements consists of classroom instruction by a credible source, hands-on evaluation and equipment- and facility- specific training. Most companies have a handle on the first two components. In many cases, employers also follow up with specific training using the equipment in their facilities. However, all too often, companies ignore the final aspect of ensuring full compliance with OSHA requirements.

Each facility, be it warehousing, assembly or manufacturing, is unique and has its own set of potential hazards. These potential hazards must be addressed in terms of operating the lift equipment in them. To ignore this is to put your operation and finances in jeopardy, because an accident can occur as a result of one of these hazards. OSHA offers specific guidelines to help guide you through your facility inspection and to identify these potential hazards.

Physical Conditions - Surface or ground conditions are an important factor in safe lift truck operations. Operating surfaces must be strong enough to support the forklift, its load and its operator. They must also be free of holes, grease, oil or obstructions that could cause the lift truck to skid or bounce, and possibly tip over.

Slippery Conditions - Your facility may have several different floor composites or coatings that can cause your lift trucks to respond differently when steering, accelerating and braking. In addition, there may be variances in floor surfaces depending upon what's going on in each part of your plant. For example, an area that utilizes grease, oil or other slippery substances may have slippery floors. Your operators (particularly new ones) need to be aware of the potential changes in forklift response when in these areas.

In areas where floors are exposed to slippery substances, it is important that you have a regular process in place to respond to a spill, and to keep the floors in these areas as clean as possible. OSHA recommends that forklifts avoid the potentially slippery areas. In addition, we recommend that you establish a daily mandatory process, making every effort to ensure that these areas receive extra attention.

Floor Loading Limits – Knowing the loading limits of your floors is very important, particularly in older buildings that may have been converted for alternative purposes (i.e., a manufacturing facility converted to warehousing). Operating heavy moving equipment like forklifts puts a heavy burden on the floors, and as a result they can develop hazards such as potholes, cracks or weak areas.

Examining your floors on a regular basis is important. So is training your operators to be aware of floor changes and to keep an eye out for potential hazards. There are additional hazards, such as railroad tracks, that are not avoidable. Training your operators to navigate these areas properly and cautiously will not only keep them safe, it will save you a tremendous amount of money avoiding tire replacement.

The floors of box vans and semi-trailers must also be able to handle the capacity of your lift trucks and the accompanying loads. Be sure that your operators know to inspect the floors of these types of equipment, and know their capacity before they use them.

Overhead Clearance – Does your facility have equipment or fixtures that hang below the height of a lifted load from your lift trucks? Examine your facility for cranes, light fixtures or anything else that could be a hazard to your operator, or to anyone standing below.

Pedestrian Traffic – Your forklift operator classroom training should cover pedestrian traffic. However, your operators also need to be made aware of any unusual situations in your facility that require particular attention. For example, there may be areas where employees might be performing functions or carrying products that may make them less aware of approaching forklifts.

We recommend that each of your lift trucks be equipped with proper, working safety equipment including back-up alarms, horns and lights (front and back). This ensures maximum operating safety for those working around your busy lift truck fleet.

Ramps, Grades and Elevators – Be sure that your operators are aware of each of these potential hazards in your facility, particularly if they have unique characteristics not found in standard facilities—i.e., a narrow grade, or a steeper-than-typical grade. If your facility has any of these conditions, you should point them out in your hands-on portion of the training.

Elevators in particular can present specific dangers. The operator should know the safe capacity of each elevator in your facility and how to safely enter, exit or deposit a load in an elevator.

More detailed information regarding site specific dangers and what you can do to avoid accidents can be found at the OSHA PIT (Powered Industrial Truck) eTool at <http://www.osha.gov/dcsp/products/etools/pit/index.html>.

Need training or additional information on this topic or assistance with your training program? Contact us at 877-366-7261 in Piqua, or 513-860-1797 in Cincinnati.