

# Forklift Safety – Proper Load Handling

## Toolbox Talk

Safety is the most important factor when lifting, lowering, or moving a load with a forklift. Smooth operation of the forklift is essential for maintaining stability and preventing accidents. As forklifts are top heavy, don't exceed the lift's rated capacity and avoid using additional counter weights to balance an overly-heavy load. Instead, split the load. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2009, there were four occupational fatalities in Texas involving forklifts.

Let's take a look at the correct way to load, carry and unload:

### Loading

- Secure your seatbelt.
- Make sure the load is within the forklift's rated capacity. The nameplate lists the maximum weight you may carry. Never exceed that weight!
- Check for a stable and centered load and stack or tie uneven or loose loads.
- Use the proper lift fixture for the type of load - carpet spike, drum grappler, etc.
- Spread the forks as widely as possible for even distribution.
- Drive into the loading position and insert the forks far enough to be sure the pallet is completely on the forks - take care not to damage materials stacked next to the pallet.
- Drive under the load until it slightly touches the carriage. Tilt the forks back to shift the weight of the load back, making it more stable.
- If the load is unbalanced, keep the heavier end closer to you. Tilt the mast back.
- Lift the load and tilt it back a little more before traveling.

### Carrying the Load

- Keep the forks six to ten inches above the ground to avoid potential ground hazards.
- Carry the load low and tilted back.

- Remember that forklifts are very top heavy when the load is high and even a small bump can tip it over.
- Don't carry anything on the overhead guard.
- Travel in reverse if the load blocks your vision.
- Always look in the direction of travel.
- Keep your arms and legs inside the forklift.
- Never reach through the mast to adjust the load.
- Do not raise or lower the load while moving.
- Use a spotter if there is not a clear view.
- Exercise caution on wet surfaces.
- Travel at an appropriate speed.

### Unloading

- Turn the forklift slowly into position.
- If unloading onto a truck, before driving straight in, make sure the rear wheels of the truck are chocked, the brakes are locked, the dock plate is secure and won't move, and trailer jacks are in place. Then drive in, position the load, tilt it forward and release it.
- If you are unloading onto a stack, position the forklift properly before lifting the forks - the forklift is top heavy, remember? You don't want to tip over.
- Check for overhead clearance before raising the load.
- Raise and position the load to the correct height - two inches above the stack.
- Slowly move the load into position.
- Allow for two to three inches of clearance at the sides and back of the load.
- Tilt the load forward and then lower it.
- Level the forks so they are no longer tilted.
- Pull the forks back slowly.
- Sound the alarm and back up slowly, looking over your shoulder.
- Once clear of obstructions, stop the forklift and lower the forks to about six to eight inches off the ground.
- Now you're ready for the next load.

