

Forklift Safety – Rules of the Road

Toolbox Talk

Did you know that the Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) estimates that forklifts cause approximately 85 fatal accidents and 34,900 serious injury accidents per year? Or that in most fatal accidents involving forklifts, the operator is the one who is killed? Many of these accidents may be avoided when safe driving skills are understood and practiced. A forklift is very different from the family car and driving one can be hazardous to your life and the life of others if the differences are not properly understood.

Forklifts are less stable than cars and can tip over more easily, and they have rear-wheel steering so the rear end of the forklift swings out when it turns. Steering a forklift requires skill and experience because its functional design makes it harder to steer and to stop. A loaded forklift weighs, on average, as much as six times the weight of a full-sized automobile (about 14,000 pounds). There may be no well-defined paths for forklift travel, making driving from one area to another unpredictable. No one should ever drive a forklift unless they have been trained and have passed an operation and driving test for each model of forklift they operate.

There are many safety areas to consider when operating forklifts. This safety training program will only focus on driving tips. Here are some of the most important safety tips to follow when operating a forklift:

Pedestrians

- Be aware of pedestrians and give them the right-of-way.
- Don't let anyone walk or stand under the raised forks.
- Keep a clear view so you can avoid pedestrians or obstacles in your path.
- Never let a person get between the forklift and a hard surface like a wall, table, bench, or any other fixed object.
- Never let anyone ride on the forks for any reason.
- Use your horn, mirrors, and flash your lights to indicate your presence to others.

Parking

- Don't park on an incline.
- Inspect and secure trailers before driving in, don't rely on anyone else to secure it for you.

- Turn the engine off when refueling and never smoke around the forklift.

Driving

- Always use your seatbelt.
- Always look before backing up.
- Use a spotter when visibility is impaired.
- Always make sure the dock plate is secure before driving over it.
- Avoid sharp turns; you could tip the forklift over.
- Cross railroad tracks on the diagonal to prevent damage to wheels and to keep the load from slipping.
- Don't allow unauthorized drivers on your forklift and especially don't let the forklift be used for horseplay.
- Drive in reverse (except up slopes) if the load blocks your view.
- Keep to the right when driving unless layout or conditions indicate otherwise.
- Keep your arms, legs, head, and feet inside the forklift when driving.
- Never drive with the forks up, or use the forklift to push other vehicles.
- Never pass a forklift going in the same direction, especially at blind spots, intersections or other dangerous areas.
- Obey speed limits, floor markings, and any other road signs.
- Remember it takes a forklift traveling at 10 mph about 22 feet to come to a full stop on a dry surface
- Slow down when driving on slippery or wet surfaces since the stopping distance is greatly increased.
- Report any and all crashes to your supervisor.
- Stay at least three vehicle lengths behind the vehicle ahead of you.
- When driving on an incline with a load, always travel with the load pointing uphill.
- When driving on an incline with no load, always travel with the forks pointing downhill.
- When you park your forklift, fully lower the forks, put the controls in neutral, turn off the engine, check the parking brake, and remove the key.
- Use wall and ceiling mirrors to help you see around corners.
- When you come to blind corners slow down, sound horn.

Source: Texas Department of Insurance, Division of Workers' Compensation

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