

## The Inside View of Forklift Safety

Have you ever wondered what must be going on in a safety & health (S&H) compliance inspector's mind when he/she is observing a lumber and building supply operation? He/she stands in silence for a few minutes and casually observes operations. Then, he/she breaks out into many questions, flowing like the rapid fire of a machine gun. Let's look at his/her forklift safety concerns.

First, has each forklift operator been properly trained to operate their forklift? All forklift operators must be trained prior to operating a forklift. He/she must receive formal, classroom-type instruction regarding the OSHA safety rules(1910.178), the forklift's operation do's & don'ts, and the company's specific business use of the forklift. Each operator should understand why certain rules exist and how to prevent injury and accident in their forklift operation. A second phase of forklift training should involve show and tell instruction by a knowledgeable, experienced trainer with demonstrations of safe operation conducting basic job activities. And lastly, the new operator should have the opportunity to demonstrate various routine job tasks on the forklift under close supervision and be evaluated. Then there should be a training document placed in the company safety training files verifying and documenting that the thorough training process took place.

Next, is all the safety and operational equipment working on the forklift and is it being used appropriately? When a forklift backs up, do you hear a back-up alarm beeping over the noise of other work activity? Are the forklift operators honking the horn when turning corners, entering/exiting the building, turning corners or slowly approaching foot-traffic or other loading activity in the area? Did the operator inspect his/her forklift before the work shift began to insure the horn and back-up alarm work, the hydraulic hoses do not leak, the tires are in good condition, forks do not have razor-sharp tips, the engine isn't making noises, the seatbelt is in good condition, the forks raise and lower appropriately, the brakes work effectively, etc. Or, is the forklift being operated without the seatbelt being worn, without the horn or back-up alarm sounding, tips of forks being scraped upon the ground when coming to a stop, loads being carried too high, hydraulic oil drips leaving a slippery path all over the warehouse, etc.? Each year about 100 workers die and over 37,000 serious injuries occur because of safety equipment not working or unsafe operation of a forklift, that's over 100 painful, expensive, work-stopping injuries per day.

If a horn or back-up alarm is not working during an S&H compliance visit, the inspector will interview forklift operators and management to determine how long the forklift has operated unsafely and determine why it hasn't been repaired. When safety items are found during the pre-shift inspection, the forklift is to be repaired immediately before use or parked and tagged "Out of Service-Do Not Operate." An unsafe forklift is never to be used when the horns don't work, there are hydraulic leaks, or when the seatbelt is damaged beyond use. Using an unsafe forklift leads to over 30% of the workplace forklift injuries and deaths. Inadequate or no training of operators is attributed to over 25% of losses and another 30% of losses occur because of inappropriate use of the forklift.

Every unsafe act on a forklift or inappropriate use of a forklift leads to more questions and concerns by an inspector. Get training, inspect the forklift daily, insure all horns work, insure no hydraulic leaks, and wear your seatbelt. The life you save maybe your own.

For additional information regarding forklift safety, please contact CSA at (678) 674-1860.