

OSHA STANDARDS FOR INDUSTRIAL WORK PLATFORMS MOUNTED ON FORKLIFTS



As every employer knows (and as we've discussed in [numerous articles](#) on this site), OSHA standards can be extraordinarily complex. That's especially true regarding material handling equipment. While OSHA's standards set out some basic rules for ensuring worker safety, interpretation becomes significantly more difficult when considering removable attachments and their various applications. When those attachments carry workers — as is the case with industrial work platforms mounted to forklifts — OSHA's guidance requires careful reading.

This article details some of the basic OSHA standards that apply to [forklift work platforms](#). However, it should not be interpreted as legal advice. Always consult with a qualified safety professional to address safety concerns and before making any changes to your operation's established work practices.

With that in mind, let's consider a few relevant sections of OSHA's standards that apply specifically to work platforms mounted on forklifts.

What OSHA Standards Apply to Forklift Work Platforms?

In an [interpretation letter](#) to a Minnesota safety professional, OSHA noted that forklift-mounted work platforms must comply with several standards. The most relevant rules are found in standard 1910.178, which addresses safety requirements for powered industrial trucks in general (including fork trucks, platform lift trucks, etc.) Standards 1926.451-1926.454 cover scaffold platforms in the construction industry and also have bearing on the use of forklift-mounted platforms.

Unfortunately, standard 1910.178 doesn't directly discuss forklift attachments intended to function as work platforms, though 1910.178(4) lays out basic general requirements for attachments that can be useful. An interpretation letter notes that OSHA considers work platforms "removable attachments" and part of the load — which we'll discuss in detail later in this article — so 1910.178(4) applies. That requirement states:



Modifications and additions which affect capacity and safe operation shall not be performed by the customer or user without manufacturers prior written approval. Capacity, operation, and maintenance instruction plates, tags, or decals shall be changed accordingly.

However, the Administration seems to refer most questions about work platforms to the requirements listed in standards 1926.451-1926.454. These requirements are also fairly straightforward. In OSHA terminology, a scaffold is any temporary elevated platform “used for supporting employees or materials or both.” As 1926.451(c)(2)(v) [states](#):

Forklifts shall not be used to support scaffold platforms unless the entire platform is attached to the fork and the fork-lift is not moved horizontally while the platform is occupied.

Once again, OSHA’s guidance is simple and reasonable — workers must never work when the platform is in motion. Platforms should also have multiple safety mechanisms and should be considered part of the load. These common-sense precautions play a crucial role in worker safety, and employers should take care to train workers to use all available safety features properly.

Can Any Forklift Support a Work Platform?

Other parts of standard 1926.451 set out requirements for using equipment to support scaffolds, which some employers mistakenly interpret as a warning against such use of forklifts and other equipment. When issuing Subpart L of this standard, however, OSHA [specifically noted](#) that “there is insufficient reason to totally ban the use of forklifts, front-end loaders and similar pieces of equipment as scaffold supports.”

Essentially, forklifts, front-end loaders, and other moving equipment can act as scaffold supports, provided that the equipment is properly designed and maintained. OSHA also requires all industrial trucks to meet the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) B56.1-1969 standards, which include “precautions for the protection of personnel being elevated by a powered industrial truck.”

To put the administration’s guidance in the simplest possible terms: If a forklift is designed to elevate a scaffold work platform, it can be used for that purpose, assuming that the equipment meets the other relevant requirements for a work platform. However, if the forklift’s operator manual specifically declares that the forklift is *not* to be used for elevating a work platform, OSHA prohibits its use for that purpose. OSHA also discourages the use of rough-terrain forklifts for lifting personnel except when a task has no practical alternative.

So, what if a forklift manual doesn’t address the issue directly? Per OSHA’s interpretation of [29 CFR 1910.178\(a\)\(4\)](#), an employer can obtain written approval from the original equipment manufacturer for modifications and additions to an industrial truck that will affect safety or operation. A Registered Professional Engineer may also give written approval. If the engineer finds the modification to be safe, but the OEM provides a negative response, OSHA may consider the use of the forklift attachment to be a *de minimis* violation (too insignificant to result in penalties).

Forklift Work Platforms Must Be Designed by Qualified Professionals

For employers, these standards have some simple implications. Notably, if you’re purchasing high-quality metal work platforms from reputable suppliers and training workers to use the equipment in accordance with the OEM recommendations, you’ve already handled most of the hard work.

When purchasing, take care to choose work platforms designed for use with forklifts, engineered with high-quality materials and with relevant safety considerations in mind. Operators shouldn't try to create their own work platforms — that's a quick way to earn a violation, since makeshift attachments probably won't have proper labeling or sufficient safety features.

Ideally, an industrial work platform mounted on a forklift will have safety harness connection points, a high mast guard, highly visible paint, and sufficient guards to prevent tools from falling off of the platform. Removable attachments should be "legibly and permanently inscribed" with a corrosion-resistant nameplate, which should detail the attachment's capacity (or rated capacity), serial number, and weight. As mentioned above, the employer should also check the lift truck's manual to ensure that work platform attachments are explicitly allowed.

Using BHS Forklift Industrial Work Platforms in Your Facility

At BHS, we're committed to providing employers and workers with durable and dependable equipment, engineered with a commitment to safety and ergonomics. Our industrial work platforms help employers maintain compliance while improving throughput, regardless of their specific application. Options include:

Forklift Work Platforms (FWP) - Designed for overhead maintenance tasks, the [BHS FWP](#) industrial work platform features a 42-inch-high guard railing, a high-visibility expanded metal mast guard, multiple safety harness attachment points, and an anti-skid surface. A practical 4-inch toe guard keeps tools within the platform, while the fork tine restraint locks the platform securely to the forks.

The FWP is available with a range of dimensions, with the largest option providing a 96" X 48" platform with a 2,000-pound capacity and an 840-pound unit weight. When paired with a suitable lift truck, the FWP series' numerous safety features take the guesswork out of compliance.

Picking Work Platforms (PWP) - The [BHS PWP](#) is designed for order picking, inventory, stock putaway, and other basic overhead tasks. It has a smaller profile than the FWP and is designed for maneuverability. Optional casters with wheel breaks allow the PWP to be transported without a lift truck, and custom designs are available. Safety features include a hook-and-chain mast restraint, an anti-skid platform deck, "safety yellow" powder coating, and toe guards.

Both of these work platforms fully comply with OSHA's requirements for personnel lifts, and their all-steel construction and durable powder coating ensure excellent long-term value.

Of course, workers still require regular training, and forklifts should be regularly inspected and repaired. Remember, various factors can affect an employer's responsibilities, including state laws, industry type, and workforce size. Consult with a qualified safety professional to ensure proper guidance for your operation.

For more information on BHS forklift attachments, visit the product pages linked above or contact our sales team at **1.800.BHS.9500**.

