

Sample Toolbox Talk: Forklift Safety – Rules of the Road

Forklift incidents cause serious injuries and fatalities every year, according to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). Most often, it is the driver who is killed when an accident occurs. Operators can avoid forklift accidents when they understand and practice safe driving skills.

Driving a forklift is different from driving a car. Operating a forklift requires additional skills and experience because its design makes it less stable and much heavier than cars. Forklifts tip over more easily and are harder to steer and stop. The rear-wheel steering also causes the rear end of the forklift to swing out when it turns. When there are no well-defined roads or paths for forklifts in a workplace, they may take unpredictable paths when driving from one area to another. No one should drive a forklift before taking proper training and passing a driving test for that specific model of forklift.

There are many safety hazards to consider when operating forklifts; this safety training aid will focus on driving. Here are some of the most important safety tips to follow when operating a forklift.

Driving

- Always use your seat belt.
- Always look before backing up.
- Use a spotter when visibility is limited.
- 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 a diagonal to prevent damage to wheels and to keep the load from slipping.
- Don't allow unauthorized drivers on a forklift, and 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 require doing otherwise.
- Keep your arms, legs, head, and feet inside the forklift when driving.
- Never drive with the forks up, and never 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 floor markings, speed limits, and road signs.
- Remember that 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, because the stopping distance is greatly increased.
- Report all crashes to a supervisor.
- Stay at least three lengths behind other vehicles.
- When driving with a load on an incline, always travel with the load pointing uphill.
- When driving without a load on an incline, always travel with the forks pointing downhill.
- Use wall and ceiling mirrors to help see around corners.
- Slow down, stop, and sound the horn at intersections, corners, and wherever vision is obstructed.

Working with Trailers

- Set the vehicle's brakes.
- Chock the vehicle's wheels.
- Install fixed jacks to support a semi-trailer that is not coupled to a tractor to prevent it from upending.
- Post signs if a vehicle should not be moved.
- Check that the height of the vehicle's entrance door clears the forklift height.
- Make sure floors can support the combined weight of the forklift and the load.
- Inspect the interior of the vehicle, including the trailer, for the following: trash, loose objects and obstructions, holes or weak floors, poor lighting, and low overhead clearance.
- Install anti-slipping material in any area that could be a hazard due to weather conditions.
- Ensure that docks and dock plates are clear of obstructions and are not oily or wet.
- Protect gaps and drop-offs at loading docks.
- Use dock plates.

Pedestrians

- Be aware of pedestrians and give them the right of way.
- Don't let anyone walk or stand under raised forks.
- Keep a clear view to help avoid pedestrians or obstacles.
- Never let a person get between the forklift and a hard surface, such as a wall, table, or bench.

- Never let anyone ride on the forks for any reason.
- Use the vehicle's horn, mirrors, and lights to let others know when the forklift is in operation.
- When possible, make eye contact with pedestrians or other forklift operators.

Parking

- Secure the lift truck when it is unattended.
- Don't park on an incline.
- Park in an approved location.
- Set the brakes.
- Lower the forks or load to the floor.
- Put the controls in neutral.
- Turn off the motor switch.