

Sample Toolbox Talk: Forklift Safety – Proper Load Handling

To handle a load safely, a forklift operator must consider dangers ranging from improper load weights to blind spots and hazards on the ground. When lifting, moving, or lowering a load with a forklift, smooth operation is essential for maintaining stability. This safety training aid looks at the correct way to load, carry, and unload when operating a forklift.

Loading

- Fasten your seat belt.
- Make sure the load is within the forklift's rated capacity. The nameplate on the forklift lists its maximum load weight. Never exceed it!
- Use the proper lift fixture for the type of load, such as a carpet spike or drum grappler.
- Make sure the load is stable and centered; stack or tie uneven or loose loads.
- Spread the forks as wide as possible for even distribution and load stability.
- Approach the load squarely, positioning and inserting 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 touches the carriage. Tilt the forks back to shift the weight of the load and make 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 6 to 10 inches above the ground to avoid potential hazards on the ground.
- Remember that forklifts are top-heavy. Carry the load low and tilted back.
- Use caution when carrying a load on an uneven surface; it creates a tip-over hazard.
- 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 you don't have a clear view.
- Exercise caution and adjust your driving and speed to current weather conditions, particularly on wet surfaces.
- Travel at a speed that will allow the forklift to be brought safely to a stop.

Unloading

- Turn the forklift slowly into position, squaring it up to the drop-off location.
- If unloading onto a semi-truck and trailer:
 - before driving in, visually inspect the inside of the trailer to ensure that the bed is in good condition and of adequate height to accommodate the forklift;
 - make sure the trailer's rear wheels are chocked, the parking brake is set, and the dock plate is down and secure;
 - slowly drive in, position the load, and tilt it forward until it is even with the surface of the unloading location;
 - then lower the load and release it.
- If unloading onto a stack:
 - position the forklift properly before lifting the forks;
 - check for overhead clearance before raising the load;
 - raise and position the load to the correct height – 2 inches above the stack;
 - allow 2 to 3 inches of clearance at the sides and back of the load;
 - move the load slowly into position;
 - tilt the load forward, then lower it;
 - level the forks so they are no longer tilted; and
 - pull the forks back slowly.
- If unloading onto a trailer or onto a stack:
 - before reversing, check the clearance behind you, sound the horn, and with the backup alarm sounding, back up slowly while looking over your shoulder; and
 - once you are clear, stop the forklift and lower the forks as far as possible. On a flat floor, lower them until they are 2 to 5 inches above the floor. On rough terrain, lift the forks higher to accommodate uneven ground.