Manufacturing Risk Advisor



Preventing Forklift-related Injuries

Forklifts are standard equipment in manufacturing operations, but they pose significant safety risks to employees. According to OSHA, between 35,000 and 62,000 injuries and an average of 87 fatalities occur each year due to forklift-related incidents. However, 70% of these incidents are preventable. This article outlines common causes of forklift-related injuries and provides strategies to prevent them.

Common Injuries and Causes

Leading causes of forklift-related injuries include the following:

- **Tip-overs** occur when forklifts become unstable, typically when they are driven on uneven ground, carry oversized loads and make sharp turns.
- **Collisions** are likely when there is poor visibility, maneuvers are rushed, and operators or pedestrians don't follow designated floor markings.
- **Falls** from forklifts can occur when workers are lifting, loading or conducting maintenance tasks at height. Allowing riders on forklifts without appropriate safety measures can also lead to falls.
- **Operator inexperience** often leads to unsafe conditions, such as improper load handling and failure to follow safety protocols, that increase the risk of accidents and injuries.

Forklift accidents can cause severe or even life-threatening injuries, including crushing injuries, head and spinal trauma, fractures and broken bones, amputations, soft tissue damage, and internal injuries.

Minimizing Injury Risks

Many forklift injuries are preventable with thorough training and adherence to workplace safety standards. Employers should consider the following strategies to avoid forklift-related injuries in their organizations:

- **Comprehensive training**—Forklift operators must receive formal training and certification that includes safe handling techniques and risk awareness. OSHA requires training every three years or after any incident or unsafe behavior.
- **Regular inspections**—Forklifts must be inspected to ensure proper operation. Operators should check brakes, tires, hydraulics and safety features, such as lights and seat belts. If a forklift is found to be unsafe, it should be reported and removed from service to prevent mechanical failures that could lead to accidents.
- **Safe driving practices**—Operators should be trained on best practices for driving a forklift, including following speed limits, keeping loads low and stable, and avoiding sharp turns. Safe driving practices help prevent accidents such as tipovers and collisions.

- **Pedestrian safety**—Designated walkways identified by floor markings, barriers and signage should be present to separate foot traffic from forklift routes. Operators should use horns and intersections and make eye contact with pedestrians before proceeding to avoid accidents.
- **Safety culture**—Employers should foster a strong culture of safety within their organizations by conducting regular training and toolbox talks, encouraging hazard and near-miss reporting, and rewarding safe behavior. Proactive hazard mitigation, such as ensuring clear aisles, adequate lighting and timely repairs, further promotes a safe work environment.
- **Regular maintenance and compliance**—Forklift maintenance and operation must comply with OSHA standards. This helps prevent breakdowns and accidents, thereby reducing liability and workers' compensation claims.

Forklift-related injuries are often preventable. Ensuring safe forklift operations not only keeps employees safe and increases morale, but it also reduces workers' compensation claims, lowers insurance premiums and maintains compliance with safety regulations.

Contact us today for more risk mitigation guidance.

BROUGHT TO YOU BY:
TOUGHCOMP
A TRUCORDIA COMPANY

212-390-8772/INFO@TOUGHCOMP.COM

This document is not intended to be an exhaustive source of information nor should any discussion or opinions be construed as legal advice. Readers should consult legal counsel or a licensed insurance professional for appropriate advice. © 2026 Zywave, Inc. All rights reserved.