



TOOLBOX TALKS

TOOLBOX TALK – SAFE FORKLIFT OPERATIONS

Week of October 2025

Purpose

Forklifts (powered industrial trucks) are essential tools on many job sites—but they're also among the most dangerous pieces of equipment when used improperly. OSHA estimates nearly **100 deaths and 35,000 serious injuries** occur annually due to forklift incidents. Today's talk reviews safe operating practices to prevent injuries and property damage.

1. OSHA Overview

Regulation: *29 CFR 1910.178 – Powered Industrial Trucks*

OSHA requires that:

- Only **trained and certified** operators may operate a forklift.
- Refresher training must occur after unsafe operation, incidents, or changes in the work environment.
- Forklifts must be **inspected daily** before use and **removed from service** if unsafe.

2. Pre-Operation Inspection

Operators must perform a visual and functional check **before each shift**.
Key inspection points include:

A. Visual Check:

- Tires: Proper inflation, no cuts or damage
- Forks: No cracks, bends, or misalignment
- Chains and hoses: No leaks, wear, or damage
- Battery or fuel: Secure and not leaking
- Lights, horn, backup alarm: Working properly
- Seatbelt: Installed and functional
- Overhead guard: Secure and not damaged

B. Operational Check:

- Brakes and steering operate smoothly
- Controls respond correctly
- Lift and tilt mechanisms function properly

If any issue is found, **tag out and report it**—do not use the forklift until repaired.

3. Safe Operation Practices

A. Operating Environment

- Always maintain clear visibility. Use a spotter when vision is obstructed.

- Observe posted **speed limits** and **warning signs**.
- Keep a safe distance (at least **three truck lengths**) between forklifts.
- Avoid sudden stops, turns, or direction changes.
- Never drive with an elevated load. Keep forks **4–6 inches** off the ground when traveling.

B. Load Handling

- Know the forklift's **load capacity**—never exceed it.
- Center loads on the forks and tilt slightly back for stability.
- When stacking, approach squarely and raise/lower slowly.
- Keep loads low when moving and never lift or lower while turning.
- Ensure pallets are stable and undamaged before lifting.

C. People and Pedestrian Safety

- Forklifts and pedestrians must **never share the same path** when avoidable.
- **Make eye contact** and **use horns** when approaching corners, aisles, or intersections.
- Never allow riders unless the forklift is designed for passengers.
- Never lift personnel on forks or pallets—only use an **approved work platform** with guardrails.

4. Parking and Shutdown

When finished:

- Park on a **level surface**.
- Lower forks fully to the floor.
- Neutralize controls and set the parking brake.
- Turn off power and remove the key.
- If on an incline, **block the wheels**.

5. Fueling and Battery Charging Safety

- No smoking or open flames near fuel or charging stations.
- Use proper PPE: gloves and eye protection.
- Ensure ventilation in battery charging areas.
- Clean spills immediately and report leaks.

6. Common Causes of Forklift Accidents

- Untrained operators
- Excessive speed or sharp turns
- Poor visibility

- Overloading or unbalanced loads
- Failing to inspect or maintain equipment
- Pedestrian interactions

7. Key Takeaways

- Forklifts are powerful tools—**not toys**.
- Stay trained, alert, and cautious at all times.
- Inspect before every shift.
- Follow capacity limits and safe travel rules.
- Respect pedestrians and your surroundings.

Safety is everyone's responsibility. If you see unsafe operation or conditions, **stop work and report immediately**.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the most common forklift hazards on our site?
2. How can we improve visibility and pedestrian awareness?
3. What's the proper action if a forklift shows a minor defect during inspection?

References

- OSHA 29 CFR 1910.178 – Powered Industrial Trucks
- OSHA Safety and Health Information Bulletin (SHIB 03-04-2008)
- National Safety Council Forklift Safety Best Practices

TOOLBOX TALK SIGN-IN SHEET

Topic: Forklift Safe Operations

Date: _____ **Location:** _____

Supervisor: _____

#	Employee Name	Signature	Date
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
11			
12			
13			
14			
15			