

Toolbox Talk

10 Tips for Forklift Safety

There are many kinds of equipment that fall under the name “Forklift” from manual pallet jacks to 60’ Telehandlers. Rough Terrain Forklifts (telehandlers, front loaders, skid loaders) are what we typically see on a construction site.

These items fall in the categories of Material Handling, and while they save us from the physical strains of heavy lifting they do come with their own hazards. Here are 10 tips for the safe operation of Forklifts.

1. Training

The OSHA regulation 1910.178 requires that the operator must be competent to operate, and has successfully completed a training program. Training programs are typically 4 hours long and include a hands on evaluation.

When you consider the expensive equipment, materials, and typical hazards, it is in your best interest to complete the training.

2. Inspection

You should always inspect your equipment before use. “Rough Terrain” forklifts implies there will be some harsh wear and tear on the wheels. A small cut on a tire can become blow out once the load is picked and driven around the site.

3. Load Capacity

Understand the load capacity of the machine and the weight of the materials. On Telehandlers especially, a thousand pound load changes quickly as the boom is extended and lifted away from the base it can easily cause a tip-over.

4. Hazard Assessment

Planning is everything. Take a thorough look around the site to ensure the machine you are using is right for the task. Note any holes, ruts, soft spots in the ground, underground utilities, and overhead wires. Also take time to have a start-up meeting with everyone working in the area.

5. Seat Belt / ROPS

Not all machines will have a seat belt, but if a machine has seatbelts you are required to wear them. Machines that have Roll-Over Protection Structure (ROPS) will typically have seatbelts to keep you in place if the machine rolls over. Machines without ROPS will not have seat belts such that the operator can jump away if the machine starts to roll.

6. Balance load/pick

One of the most common causes of Forklift accidents comes from not balancing the load. Adjust the forks to the widest position the material allows for. Lift the load slightly off the ground to see how it balances prior to lifting higher or moving.

7. Driving on slopes

Do not drive side to side or diagonally up/down a hill. The manufacture should have a diagram on the machine that shows the ideal driving conditions and where the center of gravity is. Keep the load as low to the ground as possible while traveling.

8. Securing the load

There are different attachments for different lifts. For example: Lifting trusses should be done with a Truss Boom that has a lifting eye that can hold a strap in place, not just a loose strap over the forks. Straps and chains can easily slip off forks.

9. Driving with load

Always drive with the load as low as possible, this will help prevent the machine rocking or losing control as you progress over bumps on the site. If you have limited sight around the load, or you need to move in reverse, you should use a spotter to assist.

10. Weather Conditions

The weight of a telehandler is about 17,000 pounds. When you add the load to that, you can quickly exceed 20,000 lbs. The conditions of the site should always be a factor, wet or muddy ground will cause the machine to sink and potentially tip. Very high lifts could have a wind hazard. And you should never perform a lift during thunderstorms.

Most Forklift related accidents are preventable. Whether the incident results in injury or property damage, forklift accidents are rarely “minor”. They happen so fast they are hard to correct, which is why training, preplanning, and caution should be top priority.

Questions for you

1. Have you ever taken a forklift training course?
2. How often do you work with or around telehandlers?
3. Do you know the max lifting capacity of your machine?