

Friday 28 June 2024

Forklifts – load safety

Incident Summary

Recently, an incident occurred at a depot involving dropped loads from a forklift. While loading a truck, two stacked cages were dislodged from a forklift. One fell to the ground and the other onto the overhead guard/roof of the forklift. Fortunately, the operator was not injured, and no pedestrians were present within the 3-metre exclusion forklift operating zone.

How to manage forklift loads

WHS Queensland states that the following controls within [WHSQ - Forklift Safety: Removing the risks guide](#) and [WHSQ - Understanding a forklift's load capacity guide](#) should be taken when carrying loads and loading vehicles using forklifts.

Qualifications and training

To operate a forklift, employees must be trained and hold a relevant qualification – see [WHSQ - What licence do I need / forklift trucks](#)

Employers must also provide site-specific and refresher training to maintain and enhance employees' skills as follows:

- Ensure employees receive familiarisation training for any new forklift (it may have different controls or varying attachments).
- Provide induction training for new or changed work environments, traffic management plans, policies and safe work procedures.
- If your operators are required to use purpose-designed attachments, ensure they have received sufficient instruction and training.

Forklift capacity

Employers and supervisors should be involved in knowing how loads and loading are being controlled:

- A forklift's capacity (also known as the rated capacity) is the maximum weight it can safely carry at a specified load centre. Overloading can damage the forklift and increase the risk of forklift-related injuries.
- Load capacity data plates detail the load each forklift can safely lift at different mast orientations, or when fitted with an attachment.
- The model number of some forklifts may be confused with its lifting capacity. Ensure you use the load capacity data plate to accurately determine the capacity.

Loads

- The weight, shape, size and composition of a load affects the way it should be lifted.
- When a load is raised, the forklift is less stable. Tilting forwards or backwards with a raised load will also affect stability.



- Driving with a raised load is dangerous. It makes the forklift less stable and leads to tipping over, particularly if the forklift is being driven at speed, around a corner or on an uneven surface.
- Take the time to familiarise yourself with each new type of load before you start work.

Check the load before you start

- Know the capacity of your forklift and do not exceed it. Check the load capacity data plates and the marked weight of an object, or use a weight gauge or scale to weigh loads.
- If the load is not placed safely and correctly, reload it.
- If pallets/cages are damaged, remove them.
- Set the tine width to provide the greatest support for the load and position the load so it is balanced evenly on the tines. Take special care with irregular loads or loads that may slide (such as steel on steel). Ensure the tines and the load are centred. Insert the tines fully beneath the load.

Carrying loads

- Follow the manufacturer's recommendations and safe work procedures for carrying, lowering, and setting down loads.
- Lower the load before driving to avoid driving with a raised load.
- Secure any load that extends above the backrest to prevent it from falling.
- When operating on an incline, tilt the load back and raise it only as much as necessary. Always face the load uphill and avoid turning on inclines.
- Do not add extra counterweight to the forklift.

Seeing clearly

- If a load obstructs your view on an incline, have another employee guide you from a safe position. Ensure all people are in view at all times and stop if you lose sight of them.
- Drive in reverse if a bulky load blocks your forward view, but the load must lead when going up inclines. Use a safely positioned spotter in this situation

Further controls

Having a safe work environment, well-maintained machinery, a traffic management plan, policies and procedures and effective supervision all help reduce the risk of forklift-related injuries.

Other Resources

[WHSQ - Managing the risks of plant in the workplace COP 2021](#)

[WHSQ - Managing the risks of falls at workplaces COP 2021](#)

[WHSQ - Separating forklifts and workers guide](#)

Questions

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