



# Forklift Safety: Proper Load Handling

A 5-Minute Safety Training Aid

HS00-08F (11-24)

**F**orklift operators must consider various dangers when handling loads, from improper weights to blind spots and ground hazards. Smooth operation is crucial for maintaining stability when lifting, moving, or lowering a load. This guide covers the correct way to load, carry, and unload when operating a forklift.



## Loading

- Fasten your seat belt.
- Ensure the load is within the forklift's rated capacity (check the nameplate).
- Use the proper lift fixture for the load type (e.g., carpet spike, drum grapple).
- 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 stability.
- Approach the load squarely, inserting the forks fully under the pallet.
- Drive under the load until it touches the carriage, then tilt the forks back slightly.
- For unbalanced loads, keep the heavier end closer to you.
- Lift the load and tilt it back a little more before traveling.



## Carrying the Load

- Keep forks 6 to 10 inches above the ground to avoid hazards.
- Carry the load low and tilted back, as forklifts are top-heavy.
- Use caution on uneven surfaces to prevent tip-overs.
- Do not carry anything on the overhead guard.
- Travel in reverse if the load blocks your vision.
- Always look in the direction of travel.
- Keep 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 do not have a clear view.
- Adjust driving and speed to weather conditions, especially on wet surfaces.
- Travel at a speed that allows for safe stopping.



## **Unloading**

- Slowly position the forklift, squaring up to the drop-off location.
- For unloading onto a semi-truck and trailer:
  - Inspect the trailer's interior for condition and height.
  - Ensure trailer wheels are chocked, parking brake is set, and dock plate is secure.
  - Drive in slowly, position the load, and tilt it forward.
  - Lower the load and release it.
- For unloading onto a stack:
  - Check for overhead clearance before raising the load.
  - Raise the load to 2 inches above the stack.
  - Allow 2-3 inches of clearance at the sides and back.
  - Move the load slowly into position and tilt forward.
  - Lower the load, level the forks, and pull back slowly.



## **After Unloading**

- Check clearance behind you and sound the horn.
- Back up slowly while looking over your shoulder.
- Once clear, stop and lower the forks to 2-5 inches above the floor (higher on rough terrain).



[www.txsafetyatwork.com](http://www.txsafetyatwork.com)

**1-800-252-7031, Option 2**

*The Texas Department of Insurance,  
Division of Workers' Compensation (DWC)-Workplace Safety*

P.O. Box 12050  
Austin, TX 78711-2050

---

Disclaimer: Unless otherwise noted, this document was produced by the Texas Department of Insurance, Division of Workers' Compensation using information from staff subject specialists, government entities, or other authoritative sources. Information contained in this fact sheet is considered accurate at the time of publication. For more free publications and other occupational safety and health resources, visit [www.txsafetyatwork.com](http://www.txsafetyatwork.com), call 800-252-7031, option 2, or email [resourcecenter@tdi.texas.gov](mailto:resourcecenter@tdi.texas.gov).