



Forklift Safety: Rules of the Road

A 5-Minute Safety Training Aid

HS00-08F (11-24)

Forklift accidents cause serious injuries and deaths every year, according to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). Often, it is the driver who is killed. Operators can prevent accidents by understanding and practicing safe driving skills.

Driving a forklift differs from driving a car. Forklifts require additional skills because they are:

- Less stable.
- Heavier.
- More prone to tipping over.
- Harder to steer and stop.
- Equipped with rear-wheel steering, causing the back end to swing out when turning.



In workplaces without defined paths, forklifts may take unpredictable routes. No one should operate a forklift without proper training and passing a driving test for that specific model.

These are some of the key safety tips for forklift operation:



Driving

- Always wear your seat belt.
- Look before backing up.
- Use a spotter when visibility is limited.
- Ensure dock plates are secure before driving over them.
- Avoid sharp turns to prevent tipping.
- Cross railroad tracks diagonally.
- Do not allow unauthorized drivers or horseplay.
- Drive in reverse if the load blocks your view (except on slopes).
- Keep arms, legs, head, and feet inside the forklift.
- Never drive with raised forks or push other vehicles.
- Obey floor markings, speed limits, and signs.
- Slow down on slippery surfaces.

- Report all crashes to a supervisor.
- Stay at least three lengths behind other vehicles.
- On inclines, travel with the load uphill and empty forks downhill.
- Use wall and ceiling mirrors to see around corners.
- Slow down, stop, and sound the horn at intersections, corners, and blind spots.



Working with Trailers

- Set vehicle brakes and chock wheels.
- Use fixed jacks for uncoupled semi-trailers.
- Post signs if a vehicle should not be moved.
- Check that the height of the vehicle's entrance door clears the forklift height.
- Make sure floors can support the combined weight of the forklift and the load.
- Inspect vehicle and trailer interiors for trash, loose objects, obstructions, holes or weak floors, poor lighting, or low overhead clearance.
- Install anti-slip material where needed due to weather conditions or other hazards.
- Ensure docks and plates are clear of obstructions and are not oily or wet.
- Protect gaps and drop-offs at loading docks.
- Use dock plates.



Pedestrian Safety

- Give pedestrians the right of way.
- Do not allow anyone under raised forks.
- Maintain a clear view to avoid pedestrians and obstacles.
- Never let people between the forklift and hard surfaces.
- Do not allow riders on the forks.
- Use the vehicle's horn, mirrors, and lights to alert others.
- Make eye contact with pedestrians when possible.



Parking

- Secure the forklift when unattended.
- Do not park on inclines.
- Use approved parking locations.
- Set brakes.
- Lower forks or load to the floor.
- Put controls in neutral.
- Turn off the motor.



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