

Basic forklift rules

Each year, hundreds of people are seriously injured, or even killed, while working in the same area as forklifts. Even while travelling at very slow speeds, forklifts can tip over or lose loads and potentially crush and severely injure operators or bystanders, especially when operated carelessly.

So why are forklifts so dangerous?

- They can travel up to 30km per hour
- Unlike a car, forklifts only have brakes in the front, making them harder to stop
- Counterbalance forklifts are heavier in the rear to compensate for the heavy loads being carried in the front. This uneven weight distribution can make them difficult to handle.
- A forklift is turned by the rear wheels, causing the rear end to swing outward, increasing the chance of tipping over during tight turns.
- Loads are carried in the front of a forklift, which can obstruct the view of the driver
- Forklifts are often used to raise large and heavy loads to considerable heights, a combination that is always dangerous

The first step to achieving safer forklift environments is understanding the hazards associated with operating and working around forklifts, so that you can easily identify them and avoid incidents. Some of the common hazards involved with forklift operations include:

- Collision with other workers/bystanders
- Forklifts overturning due to improper loading, careless driving or unstable ground
- Collisions with stationary or moving objects
- Driver musculoskeletal injuries
- Forklifts being recharged or refuelled unsafely or incorrectly
- Falling loads or materials
- Forklifts being incorrectly operated due to poor driver knowledge or training

When operating a forklift, what are some of things you can do to ensure your workplace is safe?

- Ensure you are licenced and trained to operate the forklift. Talk to your supervisor if you are unsure about a piece of equipment or feel you do not have the necessary experience
- Check the workplace before you start, know the location of the people working in the area around you and identify and control any potential hazards
- Check the forklift before you start to ensure it is working safely, especially if the forklift is new to you. Report any faults to your Supervisor prior to using it
- Always wear your seatbelt – it may just save your life
- When moving from dark to light areas or vice versa (i.e. such as driving from outside into a warehouse), use your horn to warn others and drive slowly as it will take time for your eyes to adjust
- Ensure the load on the forklift is secured and is not going to fall off easily. Materials on pallets should be strapped or tied down
- Whenever possible, travel with the tynes close to the ground, and travel in the direction where you have the best vision. This means that if your load blocks your view, travel backwards
- Once finished with the forklift, park it with the tynes lowered to the ground, park brake on and controls in neutral. Exit the forklift with three points of contact