FORK LIFT TRUCKS

Fork lift trucks (FLT) are familiar vehicles in many businesses and are often considered indispensable. However, they account for a large proportion of accidents in workplaces. Many of these accidents are due to operator error associated with inadequate or lack of training. Other reasons include unsuitable premises, poor layout and design of FLT operating areas and poor truck maintenance. Following the steps below will help to control the risks when using FLTs in your premises.

Step 1

Operator Selection: Those selected should be physically capable and have the ability to do the job in a reasonable manner. Any employee unfit through alcohol or drugs should not be allowed to operate a FLT.

Step 2

Training: The training of operations should be carried out by a competent instructor (e.g. an accredited trainer) and always include three stages;

- Basic training – the basic skills and knowledge required for safe operation (course duration typically 5 days)
- Specific job training – knowledge of workplace and experience of any special needs and handling attachments (three stages may be combined but should always be off the job)
- Familiarisation training – operation on-the-job under close supervision.

Step 3

Further Training: Periodically reassess all operators to ensure that they continue to operate lift trucks safely and to identify a need for refresher training, particularly those operators who have not used trucks for some time or for those who only use the occasionally.

It is essential that supervisors of operators, even if they don't drive trucks themselves, have sufficient training to recognise unsafe practices.

Training records, detailing the nature and content of the training and testing should be kept for each operator.

Step 4

Authorisation: Personnel should not be allowed to operate a FLT without a written authorisation. The authorisation should relate to a specific type of FLT and the work for which the employee has been trained. The keys should be removed from the FLT when not in use and kept in a safe place to prevent unauthorised use.

Step 5

Layout: The driving areas should be as flat as possible and free from obstructions. Roads, gangways and aisles should have sufficient width and overhead clearance for the largest FLT using them. Sharp bends should be avoided and one-way traffic systems should be introduced to reduce the risk of collisions. Pedestrians should be excluded from FLT working areas if possible, if not, warning notices and direction signs should be

clearly displayed. Audible warning devices and flashing beacons should be fitted to the FLTs. Appropriate restraints, such as seat belts, should also be fitted.

Suitable PPE should be identified and provided i.e. hard hats, safety footwear, fluorescent jackets etc.

Daily/weekly checks of and records of inspection by driver/manager, i.e. tyres, horns, lights, steering, brakes etc.

Step 6

Safe Working Load (SWL): Drivers must be aware of the SWL of the truck and ensure that it is not exceeded. Attachments such as clamps and cages will reduce the SWL of the FLT and an authorised dealer should be contacted for advice regarding the reduced SWL. The operator should be given additional training on the use of such attachments.

Step 7

Platforms: Working at heights should never be carried out from the fork arms or from a pallet balanced on the fork arms of a FLT. Specifically designed work platforms secured to the truck may be used under limited controlled conditions e.g. changing a light bulb. They are unsuitable for moving goods or people from one level to another or for order picking.

Step 8

Passenger: Should NOT under any circumstances be carried in the cab, on the forks or on the sides etc of a FLT.

Step 9

Battery Changing: This should be carried out in a separate room or designated area with good high level ventilation and no direct ignition sources. “No Smoking” and “No Naked Lights” warning notices should be provided in the area.

Step 10

Maintenance: Develop a system for reporting defects and for ensuring that remedial work is carried out. Develop a planned routine maintenance system including:

- Daily checks of tyres, brakes etc by the driver at the beginning of each shift
- More in-depth weekly checks by the store/warehouse manager (written reports should be made and kept)
- Thorough examinations by an engineer at least every 12 months or in accordance with an examination scheme.
- Checks by an engineer following an accident, major repair or modification. A certificate should then be issued that the FLT is safe to use.