

FORKLIFTS INFORMATION SHEET FOR OWNERS AND OPERATORS

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Overview

This Information Sheet provides advice for small businesses and workers on managing risks associated with operating powered forklifts in the workplace.



For more information see the [General guide for industrial lift trucks](#).



Training and supervision

A person who operates a forklift must hold a high risk work forklift licence.

Training to get a high risk work licence must be completed as part of a course from a Registered Training Organisation (RTO). A person training to operate a forklift may operate a forklift at their workplace if they are:

- enrolled with an RTO to train as a forklift operator, and
- directly supervised while operating the forklift by a person who has both the right licence to perform the high risk work and suitable workplace experience.

Traffic management

Most forklift incidents involve pedestrians. Forklift trucks must not collide with pedestrians or other powered mobile plant. You should make sure there are clear, separate pathways for pedestrians and forklifts. High visibility work wear should be worn if walking outside of designated walkways. Businesses should minimise blind spots and highlight intersections and restricted areas. If there is a right-of-way, make sure that everyone is aware of it. If this is not possible, you should try to keep eye contact with pedestrians.



For more information see the [General guide for workplace traffic management](#).

Pre-start safety check

Before you operate a forklift, both the forklift and any attachments should be checked. You should be familiar with the operating controls.

A pre-start safety check should be done every time you use a different forklift and at the beginning of each shift, as the forklift may not have been left in a safe condition by a previous operator.

Examples of what to look for can be found in the [General guide for industrial lift trucks](#).

Using seatbelts

Seatbelts and other restraint systems should be used when they are provided unless a risk assessment indicates it is not safe to do so and other risk controls are implemented. Seatbelts keep you in the cab during a tip over and prevent you from being thrown from your seat. Manufacturers' operating manuals include a warning to use seatbelts. You must be trained in the manual's instructions, warnings and precautions for restraint system use.

Lifting attachments

You should make sure the forklift is equipped with lifting attachments that are right for the load to be lifted or moved, only if required.

If an attachment is fitted to a forklift, make sure you have access to information about the attachment. By using the forklift load chart and the attachment information (often found on the attachment's load rating plate) the de-rated load capacity of the industrial lift truck can be calculated.

The attachment should be secured to the forklift as required by the manufacturer's instructions. Specific training and supervision in the use of an attachment should be provided as necessary.

Working near electric lines

You should make sure no person or part of the forklift comes within an unsafe distance of an overhead or underground electric line.

Electric lines pose significant risks including electrocution, arcing, explosion or fire causing burns, unpredictable cable whiplash and other objects being electrified like signs, poles, trees or branches. Contact with energised overhead or underground electric lines can be fatal.

It is not necessary to touch an overhead electric line to be electrocuted. A 'flashover' or 'arc' can electrocute you if you are too close to an electric line.

For more information about electrical safety see the [General guide for working in the vicinity of overhead and underground electric lines](#). Information is also available from the Electricity Regulator.

Operating a forklift

When operating a forklift you should:

- look in the direction of travel and keep a clear view of the way ahead

- slow down, seek help from others to direct you or drive in reverse if it safe to do so, if vision is blocked
- keep body parts within the forklift
- avoid distracting behaviour e.g. using a mobile phone or smoking
- be aware of other vehicles and people and give clear indications of your intentions to others e.g. sound the horn to alert other vehicles and pedestrians especially before doorways or where no traffic signs or signals exist
- drive at a safe speed in line with site speed limits, the load and the existing weather and road conditions
- drive with the fork arms as close to the ground as reasonably practicable, with the tips of the fork arms tilted slightly upwards and away from the ground, whether driving with or without a load
- adjust your operating style to match the conditions – the ground surface, weather conditions, layout of the operating area and other hazards that may exist like water
- avoid speeding up, decelerating and turning too quickly
- make sure loading trucks and trailers are stopped and secured at the loading dock with the brakes set. Use jack stands when necessary to prevent trailers from upending. If portable yard ramps are used make sure they are secured to the truck or trailer
- be aware of fumes and possible carbon monoxide poisoning when operating propane-powered forklifts indoors
- lower the carriage, park on level ground with the load removed, apply the park brake, leave the controls in neutral and shut off the power – locking the start control in the ‘off’ position before getting off a forklift, and
- follow the manufacturer’s recommendations when slinging a load under the forks (“free rigging”) and using lifting straps.

What can cause a forklift to tip over?

- Excessive speed – especially while turning.
- Heavy braking.
- Overloading.
- Moving with an elevated mast and load.
- Sloping surfaces.
- Traveling down ramps with load forward.
- Turning sideways on ramps.
- Smooth and slippery surfaces.
- Forks striking an obstruction.
- Tight turns.
- Shifting or off-centre loads.

Work platforms and boxes

Forklifts may be used to provide a safe work platform if they are designed to lift people (see Figures 1 and 2). Workboxes should only be used to raise people performing occasional tasks and must be securely attached to the forklift.

The forklift operator should:

- check that the forklift is suitable, can carry the expected load and has the correct workbox attachments
- check the workbox is attached securely in accordance with the manufacturer’s instructions
- check that people can safely exit from the workbox and the forklift in the event of a failure in its normal operation
- make sure the park brake is on, the controls are in neutral and the mast vertical
- perform a test lift with the workbox attached before people enter the workbox, and
- remain at the controls at all times while people are in the workbox.

i For further information see the [Safe Work Australia](http://www.swa.gov.au) website (www.swa.gov.au).

FIGURE 1 An example of an engineer-designed work box with safety harness and lanyard correctly positioned on the fork arms

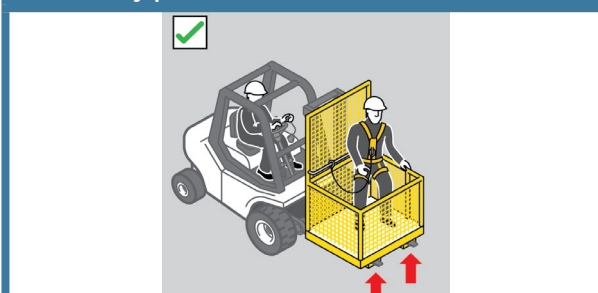


FIGURE 2 It is not safe to use a forklift as a work platform or to gain extra height by standing on the fork arms or a pallet

