



Forklift Safety

What are powered industrial trucks (PIT)?

Powered industrial trucks, commonly called forklifts or lift trucks, are used in many industries, primarily to move materials. They can also be used to raise, lower, or remove large objects or a number of smaller objects on pallets or in boxes, crates, or other containers. Powered industrial trucks can either be ridden by the operator or controlled by a walking operator.*

Workplace Hazards

There are many types of powered industrial trucks. Each type presents different operating hazards. For example, a sit-down, counterbalanced high-lift rider truck is more likely than a motorized hand truck to be involved in a falling load accident because the sit-down rider truck can lift a load much higher than a hand truck. Workplace type and conditions are also factors in hazards commonly associated with PIT's. Workers can be injured when (1) lift trucks are inadvertently driven off loading docks; (2) lifts fall between docks and an unsecured trailer; (3) they are struck by a lift truck or caught between the truck and a fixed object; (4) or they fall while on elevated pallets and tines.*

Training

Only employees that have been properly trained and evaluated may operate any type of PIT or forklift. Formal (lecture, video, etc.) and practical (demonstration and practical exercises) training must be provided. Employers must also certify that each operator has received the training and evaluate the operator's performance and determine the operator to be competent to operate a PIT safely. Refresher training is needed whenever an operator demonstrates a deficiency in the safe operation of the truck. Operators must be evaluated every three years.

Preventative Maintenance and Inspections

OSHA requires that all forklifts be inspected at minimum daily before each use. Forklifts used around the clock must be examined after each use. Defects, when found, must be immediately reported and corrected. Any truck not in safe operating condition shall be removed from service until repaired by authorized and qualified personnel.

Safe Operation

- Always wear your seatbelt when operating the forklift.
- Ensure that all loads are within the rated capacity of the truck before attempting to lift.
- Ensure that the load is stable and secure before proceeding with the load.
- Do not drive up to anyone standing in front of bench or fixed object. Never allow anyone to stand or pass under the elevated portion of any truck, whether loaded or not.
- No riders are allowed on the truck unless the truck is designed and approved for such.
- Keep arms and legs within the running lines of the truck and out of the mast and upright areas.
- Maintain a safe distance from the edge of ramps or platforms when on elevated surface.
- When unloading trucks, trailers, or rail cars the brakes must be set and wheels chocked while loading and/or unloading. Dock-board or bridge-plates shall be properly secured and exercise caution when traveling over them.

- Inspect all work areas to ensure adequate headroom and clearance from overhead hazards. Take into consideration the height of the mast and forks when raised.
- Obey all traffic regulations. Maintain safe speed, when speed limits are not posted travel no faster than a fast walking pace.
- Maintain safe distance of at least 3 truck lengths when following another truck.
- No stunt driving or horseplay.
- Slow down and sound the horn at all intersections, cross walks, cross aisles or areas where the approaching truck may be difficult to be seen.
- Slow down when making turns.
- Always look in the direction of travel and maintain a clear view of the path of travel. When the load obstructs the forward view, the truck should be driven with the load trailing.
- When operating truck on grade ascend and descend at a slow speed. Adjust and tilt the load according to the grade and surface conditions.
- Drive with the load low, 6"-8" off of the ground and tilted backwards slightly.
- Raise and lower the load only when fully stopped.
- Only trained and authorized employees may engage in recharging or refueling operations.
- When parking the truck do not block fire aisles, access to stairways, fire equipment, exits or other emergency equipment.
- When leaving the forklift, lower the forks, neutralize the controls, shut off power, and set the brakes.

* Source: <https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/powerindustrialtrucks/>