

Lessons **LEARNED**



TARGET
The issue.



INVESTIGATE
The incident.



DEVELOP
Safety measures.

Forklift Safety and Housekeeping

In the 3rd quarter of 2023, one of our heavy construction accounts suffered a workers compensation loss with a total incurred of \$3.1 million due to a forklift running over its operator. The operator, a 33-year-old husband and father of 3, was a 2-year tenured employee with the company and a certified forklift operator. This employee had just received a renewal forklift operation safety training a few months prior to this incident. On the day of the accident, the operator had placed a spare piece of metal banding on the floorboard of his forklift and continued to operate the machine to complete his task.

As he continued to operate the forklift, he drove it over an uneven area of dirt, causing the banding to slip off the side of the cab floorboard. The employee reported to have bent over to grab the banding. When the employee grabbed it, one end of the banding was pulled under the tire of the moving forklift and caused the employee to be drug out of the cab. The employee was not wearing his seatbelt and was pulled right off his seat. Once the employee was drug out of the cab and hit the ground, the forklift was still in motion and ran over the employee causing significant harm.

Injuries sustained by this accident included:

- Massive Crush Injury to Abdomen and Pelvis
- Hemorrhagic Shock Grade 4 Anorectal Injury
- Ruptured Urinary Bladder
- Grade 5 Posterior Urethral Injury
- Right Kidney Laceration
- Right internal Iliac Artery Injury
- Pelvic Fractures, Multiple
- Open Book Pelvic Fracture
- Right Iliac Fracture
- Sacroiliac Fracture
- Spinal Cord Injury
- Retrolisthesis of L5-S1
- Sacral Epidural Hematoma; 8 cm

This employee is still struggling with mild deficits with attention and visuospatial skills, moderate deficits with memory, and severe deficits with executive functioning and language. The policyholder's incident report concluded that forklift safety policies, procedures and rules were ignored, likely due to the employee creating a "shortcut" by not wearing his seatbelt because he was required to start, stop, and get in and out of the forklift frequently to complete his task.

What Can RMC's Observe in our Visits for this Exposure?

While walking a jobsite or warehouse visit, observe your insured employees operating in the field, and note if seatbelts are being worn. Forklift operators are required to wear a seat belt, without exception. Powered Industrial Trucks (that includes forklifts, man lifts, pallet jacks and more) are listed as OSHA's 10 Most Frequent Cited Standards (1.0) and this is due to collisions, tip-overs, and more. An OSHA fine for seat belt safety can lead to thousands of dollars. Per OSHA's records, 80-100 yearly fatalities occur due to forklift operators being crushed from tipped equipment, with equipment weighing over 9,000 lbs or more. During our visit we should verify:

- Review the safety manual for work policies and procedures for forklift operation.
- Confirm that all forklift operators are trained and certified for operation.
- Discuss the disciplinary process for those who are found to not be wearing seat belts.

Also actively observe the cleanliness and housekeeping of all operating equipment. Cabs, floorboards, seats, and dashboards should all be clear of clutter, debris, and material. Forklifts are not designed to store material, trash, debris or other items on the cab floor or under the lift arm unless otherwise addressed in the manufacturer instructions. Storage of items not made for forklift cab floors can cause slipping, falling, pedal blockage, or more. Items as small or simple as an empty water bottle should not be rolling on a floorboard. During our visit we can verify:

- Equipment pre/post inspections are being completed by all operators, including cleanliness and housekeeping of equipment. Daily, pre-shift inspection of powered industrial trucks is required by OSHA standards.
- JHA's are being completed and include the use and exposures of forklift or industrial truck operations.
- Observe overall upkeep and maintenance of forklifts, does it look well kept and maintained? Verify if warning labels are visible and operating instructions are inside the equipment.
- OSHA has helpful daily checklists for reference.

Our Team
ENSURES
Safety



SAFETY FIRST

Always ensure that seat belts are fastened when using a forklift.



CLEAR THE PATH

Be sure that the floorboard of the forklift is always clear.



SPOT CHECK

Look for material in all areas of the forklift that should not be holding material. **Example:** Spare rebar was placed outside the forklift.

In conclusion, the tragic incident detailed above starkly highlights the critical importance of stringent adherence to forklift safety protocols and housekeeping standards. It serves as a somber reminder that safety shortcuts and minor oversights can have devastating consequences. Ensuring that floorboards are clear of obstructions, operators are consistently wearing seat belts, and all safety procedures are followed without exception is not just about compliance, but about protecting lives.

As we move forward, let us reaffirm our commitment to rigorous safety practices, comprehensive training, and vigilant supervision to prevent such incidents in the future. Our focus must remain on creating and maintaining a safe working environment for all employees, underscored by a culture that prioritizes well-being over convenience.

SOURCES CITED:

01

www.osha.gov/top10citedstandards

02

www.osha.gov/training/library/powerd-industrial-trucks/checklist