

# Give safety a lift

**A commitment to training and OSHA regulations will ensure not just worker safety, but increase productivity**

**Ron Brewer, Crown Equipment Co. -- Plant Engineering, 8/3/2009 9:39:35 AM CDT**

OSHA estimates that approximately 680,400 lift truck accidents occur each year. The hard fact is that most of these accidents can be prevented with proper training and the adoption of best practices and safe work habits.

Here are six primary areas businesses should focus on to help create a safe environment for lift truck operation.

## **1. Operator training**

When done properly, operator training should consist of a logical progression of events that result in informed, skilled operators who consistently practice safe work habits.

### ***Initial operator training***

In addition to learning general material handling and workplace rules, and how to operate the equipment, your workers must also understand and implement safe operating habits. These habits, supported by knowledge gained through training, will determine whether or not they are safe lift truck operators.

### ***Skill development, certification time***

Initial operator training typically lasts about one day, while material handling skill development can take much longer. It is important that you constantly supervise new operators after initial training for as long as necessary, either by having supervisors alongside them or using lead operators following on another lift truck.

Certification means that not only have operators been trained, but also that their employer has certified that they have demonstrated successful and safe performance of all job requirements. Even after certification, many companies require freshmen operators to wear orange vests, and instruct supervisors and experienced operators to watch them and provide feedback and coaching until they become well accomplished operators.

### ***Pedestrian training***

Pedestrian injuries consistently rank among the five most common lift truck accident scenarios. You need to ensure that any pedestrians in your facility or workplace are trained to properly navigate near operating lift trucks. You also need to educate them of the possible dangers, as well as instruct them to pay attention and communicate with lift truck operators.

### ***Trainer qualifications***

According to OSHA CFR 1910.178(l)(2)(iii), "all operator training and evaluation shall be conducted by persons who have the knowledge, training and experience to train powered industrial truck operators and evaluate their competence."

Regardless of whether your company employs its own trainers or you outsource initial training, you need to make sure trainers are qualified. You also should determine where initial training ends and on-the-job training and evaluation responsibilities begin.

## **2. Supervision**

Even if your lift truck operator training program is best-in-class, it will only be effective if it is supported by a strong supervisory structure. If, upon completion of training, your new operators enter an environment where the experienced operators disregard safe operating habits, there is a good chance that any lessons learned by the new operators will rapidly be forgotten.

Safe operating habits and practices learned in initial training must be reinforced by supervision and examples provided by mentor operators. You need to make sure your supervisors know the habits to reinforce and can properly identify those safe operating habits. If you get a blank look after explaining the need to honk horns at intersections and slow down in heavy traffic, you are likely already losing this battle.

Your supervisors should also go through operator training and fully understand the rules of safe operation on all equipment types within your workplace. For example, Crown Equipment Corporation's LeadSafe lift truck safety program teaches supervisors how to observe and track safe lift truck operation, evaluate a warehouse, identify relevant OSHA regulations and provide appropriate feedback to operators.

It is important that supervisors encourage safe operating practices and behaviors as fervently as they promote productivity. If they do this, you will quickly understand how both safety and productivity go hand-in-hand.

## **3. Equipment maintenance**

If you want your lift truck operators to work safely and productively, your equipment needs to be maintained to work properly at all times.

Proper planned maintenance, performed at appropriate intervals, along with the use of proper parts and repair methods, is the foundation of a good equipment maintenance program. To build on this foundation, you must also take pre-shift equipment inspections and operator complaints seriously and not allow equipment to be operated unless all systems are performing properly. This is not an area where you can get by with a bare minimum. If you sacrifice equipment and facilities maintenance, you will sacrifice worker safety, as well as uptime, productivity and the life of your equipment.

## **4. Pre-use inspection**

While a thorough pre-use inspection is required by OSHA, it is also a smart business practice. These inspections should always be performed before any piece of equipment is put into operation during a shift.

Pre-use inspections usually take experienced operators little time to perform. When done properly and regularly, they allow operators to fully understand the working condition of the lift truck they are about to use, eliminating surprises if something doesn't work as expected.

When an operator discovers a problem on a pre-use inspection, the lift truck should be taken out of service, locked and tagged out and fully repaired prior to being available for use again.

## **5. Laws and standards**

Understanding OSHA 1910.178 training requirements will help the business and the operator comply with OSHA law and further create a safe workplace. The 2004/2005 ANSI/ITSDF B56.1

standard also contains updated information that can help you understand safe lift truck practices. It features a section titled, "For the User" that every employer should read, understand and put into practice.

Learning and complying with these standards is a sure way to help prevent OSHA citations and promote a safe operating environment for lift trucks.

## **6. Constant workplace evaluation**

The final area you should focus on to help create a safe environment for lift truck operation is workplace evaluation. Only through constant workplace evaluation will you be able to set goals and identify areas for additional training and improvement.

A properly designed workplace evaluation program can help you gain valuable insight into workplace safety. Areas of inquiry and awareness should include:

- The areas within your workplace that have the highest incident or close call rates
- The types of operations or tasks that seem to have the highest rates
- The conditions, situations, tasks or areas that your operators feel are the most challenging
- Operators who are viewed as potentially unsafe to work around by other operators
- Changes in weight, size and/or shape of materials handled, as they may affect equipment requirements and/or training needed
- Changes in processes or workflows, as these may affect already congested traffic areas and/or training required.

By focusing your attention on these six key areas, you can significantly increase the safety of your workplace. Creating a safer environment for lift truck operation can help you avoid operator injuries and equipment, facility and product damage, as well as protect you from possible liabilities and fines and even lower your insurance and maintenance costs.

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## Common causes of lift truck injuries

How do most material handling equipment accidents and/or injuries occur?

- Distractions near break, lunch, end of shift, etc.
- Handling unusual loads or performing unusual tasks
- Inadequate equipment maintenance
- Temporary workers who are inadequately trained/skilled
- Poor operating habits, including:
  - Traveling too fast for area
  - Traveling with forks/load raised
  - Improper operating position
  - Continuing to operate while distracted
  - Operating with known equipment maintenance issues
  - Lack of communication with other operators, pedestrians
  - Early dismounts
  - Walking in front of moving equipment (pickers)
  - Not wearing fall protection or seat belt
- Poor training, including:
  - Not reading operators manual
  - Unaware of difference between braking and plugging on electric lift trucks
  - Unaware of truck capacity or how to read capacity plate
  - Unaware of safety rules of docking, transporting, stacking or battery changing and charging
  - Unaware of how to perform pre-shift inspections.