



## 6 Tips for Forklift Safety in Your Facility and Dock Area

### Beneficial and Dangerous Vehicles

Forklifts add a lot of value to commercial and industrial facilities. Lifting and moving large loads and pallets with precision can provide a distinct advantage over carts or hand trucks. There are many different types of forklifts based on applications, operating environments, sizes, capacities, and methods of power. Forklifts can be powered by batteries, propane, gasoline, or diesel fuel.

Some forklifts are designed to be used in a hazardous environments or locations where there is a threat of fire or explosion. Forklift attachments are available to extend reach, clamp objects, lift specific sizes and shapes of objects, or lift people.

Forklifts can deliver materials handling speed and efficiency to an operation while lowering the risk of injury from manual lifting, pushing and pulling. But forklifts also present a much greater risk of injury or death to operators and other personnel. Improper training, careless or reckless operation, and malfunctions all contribute to the approximately 100 people killed and 20,000 injured each year in forklift accidents in the United States.

How do forklift accidents kill or injure? There are numerous ways, but some of the most common are overturning, feet being run over, falling from the forklift, or being crushed by the forklift. In just one of many tragic examples, a forklift operator was recently killed when he tried to jump as the forklift overturned and his head hit the overhead guard.



According to a Penn National Insurance safety report, forklift overturns are by far the leading cause of death involving forklifts, representing 25% of all forklift related fatalities. Roughly every 3 days, someone in the United States is killed in a forklift related accident. The costs incurred due to forklift accidents are estimated to be over one hundred million dollars annually. The following tips are intended to help your organization avoid being part of these statistics.

## Tips for Safety and Efficiency

**1. Train early and often.** Occupational safety and health regulations call for forklift operators to be trained on the forklifts they will be using. Employers are responsible for making sure training is conducted properly and documented, and that trainees are evaluated prior to using the forklift. Typically a training course starts with instructor lecture, computer aided learning, and interactive discussion. Hard copy study material is used for reinforcement and tracking progress. From there the training moves on to instructor led live demonstrations and hands-on exercises. It's important that the quality of the training be validated with an evaluation of the trainee on the forklift in its operating environment.

**2. Keep surfaces clean and dry.** The surfaces within a facility have a big impact on safe forklift operation. Uneven surfaces, debris, and other surface anomalies make it harder to steer and can cause sudden, unplanned stops. Dirty surfaces can cause wheels to stick and could disrupt a load or the forklift itself. It's important to remember that the load weight and a substantial part of the forklift weight could be on a single wheel at any given time. That makes keeping surfaces clean and dry a top priority.

**3. Secure trucks and trailers.** Failure to properly secure a truck or trailer with vehicle restraints can cause the trailer to move during loading and unloading. In these cases there is a considerable risk of the forklift falling between the trailer and the loading dock. This is especially important when forklifts are driven onto trucks or trailers over a dock board (bridge plate), since the dock board could fall between the trailer and the dock. Restraint options range from wheel chocks to systems mounted to the dock that clamp onto a bar below the trailer. Restraint systems that signal when the restraint is engaged or if there is a problem with restraining the truck or trailer can add extra safety value.



**4. Secure dock plates.** Unsecured dock plates can move over time. This can result in sudden stops or load disruption if the forklift wheels get stuck between the dock and the truck bed. Portable dock boards should be secured to prevent them from moving. For example, some dock boards have pins that are inserted into the sides to prevent the board from shifting toward the dock or trailer. Portable dock boards should also have handles for safe placement and removal.

**5. Inspect and Maintain.** Regulations typically require every forklift to be checked for defects before it's put into service. Forklifts that are used continuously should be checked at the end of each shift. Unsafe forklifts should be removed from service until repaired by an authorized professional. Follow the preventive maintenance outlined in the owner's manual to keep the forklift in safe operating condition, and

keep detailed records on any repairs. This will support regulatory compliance and provide proof of maintenance if and when required.

**6. Get Expert Help.** Consider the benefits and advantages of an experienced solution provider for forklift safety, especially as it pertains to your dock operations. A qualified solution provider will help you with big picture dock safety strategy including forklift safety designed to fit your unique operational requirements.

## Contact American Door and Dock



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