



## Safety Bulletin

### The Compliance and Complacency of Using Forklifts

Forklifts, although relatively small pieces of plant and equipment are known to be one of the most hazardous workplace vehicles. Incidents involving forklifts are frequently serious and often fatal. They are used regularly in warehouses, workshops and on construction and mining sites. It is this frequent use, the fact that they are quiet and seen as part of the environment that there's the potential for employees to become complacent when working in and around them.

#### Forklift accidents

Forty per cent of these involve serious injuries with five or more days required off work. Sprains and strains from sitting or getting in and out of the forklift are the most common injury. The next one is being hit by a forklift or its load. It is not just the forklift operator who is at risk. Manoeuvring around people, shelving, intersections, and cornering can all place workers on foot in the line of fire.

#### Why are forklifts so dangerous?

Forklifts are useful vehicles and they have changed the way warehouses, workshops and sites operate. They are also dangerous pieces of equipment when not managed safely as they:

- weigh up to 4 tonnes, which is about three times heavier than most cars.
- reach speeds of up to 30 kph.
- only have brakes in the front, making them harder to stop.
- can carry heavy loads, making the counterbalance of weight sometimes difficult.
- usually carry large and awkward loads, causing visibility issues for the operator.



#### The cost of forklift accidents

Sometimes it takes a near miss whilst driving your car to wake you up, refocus and remember that you are behind the wheel of a powerful piece of machinery. The same goes when operating a forklift. In most states in Australia and many countries globally, specific and certified training is a prerequisite to operating a forklift. Safety at work is everyone's responsibility, however the onus falls on the employer to provide and maintain a safe working environment. This includes ensuring the safe operation of equipment such as the forklift.

#### Minimising the risk

**Employers** are responsible for providing a safe work environment, safe systems of work, safe and well-maintained machinery and information, training and supervision. These combined with the principles of hazard identification and control, risk management and an effective traffic management plan can help reduce the risk of forklift-related injuries.

**Workers** have responsibilities too. These include working with, and communicating to, employers and co-workers to improve safety, complying with instructions and training, reporting hazards, and using PPE correctly.

#### Education and training are fundamental

To operate a forklift safely and legally in most states and countries you must have a valid license. Organisations need to have safe operating procedures in place and employees are under an obligation to follow them. No matter how simple or complex your facility, it is critical to have an induction and on-boarding program for new team members. It's recommended that ongoing fresher training is undertaken to address complacency, especially when work is repetitive, or tasks are completed the same way every day.

The Safe Work Australia Code of Practice for [Managing the risks of plant in the workplace](#) states that "training programs should be practical and 'hands on' and take into account the particular needs of workers, for example literacy levels, work experience and specific skills required for safe use of the plant". MLA Holdings Pty Ltd can provide you with expert advice on forklift safety, as well as providing safety devices [and fleet management systems](#) to enhance your forklift safety. Contact us on 1300 000 652 or visit [www.mlaholdings.com.au](http://www.mlaholdings.com.au). Information for this article was sourced from [www.tapintosafety.com.au](http://www.tapintosafety.com.au).

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