



# Distribution Center MANAGEMENT

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Managing people, materials and costs in the warehouse and DC

## ■ From the Golden Zone

### Fleet software can boost visibility, control into forklifts

By Norm Saenz Jr. and Steve Sepmore

Do you have the correct number of forklifts for your operation? Which of your older forklifts have become costly to maintain? Are operators correctly completing vehicle checklists to comply with OSHA regulations?

If you can't answer these questions, you'll be pleasantly surprised by the new breed of technology available today. With Fleet Optimization Systems (FOS), forklift vendors are providing more information than ever before about your fleet — and new ways to answer those questions that have puzzled DC managers in the past.

FOS lets you track the use and maintenance of your lift trucks. The benefits of a FOS application fall into four categories:

**1. Verification of operator access.** How high are the costs associated with forklift accidents in your warehouse operation each year? Would you like to better manage forklift activity? There are big savings in avoiding costly accidents involving damage to trucks, racks, and injured workers within your warehouse.

Most FOS packages include a verification process to ensure every forklift operator is properly set-up. An operator badge is used to scan in and out of the FOS to identify criteria such as the operator's name, the forklifts he has been authorized to operate, and when his forklift license

expires. Depending on the software package, this information is configured to meet specific customer specifications.

FOS gives managers total control of the OSHA vehicle checklist. These questions are configurable by the DC. Enter them into the system and set the frequency with which the operator must answer these queries.

The system also provides controls to meet requirements of insurers. With this software, safeguards are in place to ensure that a forklift cannot be operated without signing into the FOS. The checklist can be printed or displayed on a monitor when there is an audit by an insurer or by OSHA. The FOS provides certainty that the checklist is being properly filled out before the forklift is used.

Once a forklift operator has logged into the FOS, there is a complete history of the operator's forklift activity and ultimately a measurement of the operator's productivity. The system tracks which forklifts are used, the number of hours a specific forklift remained in use, and the hours spent traveling. Managers can track where the hours were spent on each shift to rate productivity.

The systems have been designed to show when an operator tried to log into a forklift with expired certification. The system sends an email

FOS lets you track the use and maintenance of your lift trucks.

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to the operator's supervisor and safety manager alerting them of certifications that are due to expire. Managers can customize this feature, specifying who will get the email. Another safety feature of the FOS is the ability to track by operator the number of impact warnings and actual impacts for a designated period.

**2. Monitoring forklift hours.** Is the wrong mix of lift trucks in your fleet leading to costly repairs and killing operator productivity?

FOS tracks the number of hours that an operator uses a forklift. It is used to track the horizontal and vertical movement, so a manager can understand the breakdown of hours. This ensures the right forklift is used for each warehouse job. For example, if you realize a counterbalance forklift is miscast for horizontal stocking and putaway, you could deploy a less costly pallet rider.

The FOS will provide information by operator, so managers can see the breakdown of hours each department is putting on each forklift. If a forklift sits idle more than 20 percent of the time, managers must ask what can be done to increase the number of hours to improve the efficiency of each forklift. Managers can study the numbers provided by the FOS and pose more intelligent questions.

**3. Impact notifications.** Accidents often happen in the late hours, when nobody is around. Managers walk into the facility the next morning to find pallet rack uprights have been buckled or a forklift needs repairs. FOS provides this visibility in the absence of other evidence.

The FOS impact system lets you set impact ratings in G-force. If an operator hits something and the collision falls into the range you've specified, you'll get an email alert.

**4. Tracking maintenance costs.** Running your lift trucks into the ground can cost more than leasing or buying a new vehicle. The last feature of the FOS is designed to show where maintenance dollars are spent. The program tracks battery life, repairs done on each forklift by date and time, a list of parts that were used to repair the forklift, and the repair technician's notes.

Managers are able to review the forklift inventory and determine which forklifts are spending more time in maintenance as well as the maintenance expense for each forklift. This information is critical to determining when it's time to replace an old lift truck.

If your trucks are leased, the FOS provides detailed maintenance records to justify the replacement of the forklift by the leasing company. The FOS also lets you see if a specific part is continuously being replaced. If so, you can negotiate with the forklift provider and request some information that shows this failure is due to issues with the part itself, which could lead to no charge on the replacement of that part. This also alerts the forklift provider of an issue, so they can proactively research the issue and help to resolve persistent downtime.

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