



Safety and Security

Forklift training, speed limits are keys to safety

If your idea of forklift safety is turning operators loose and putting up a few posters reminding them to be careful, it might be time to take safety seriously.

Every distribution center needs a formal training program that teaches operators to drive safely, says Benjamin Mangan, president of safety publisher MANCOMM — but effective safety efforts are too rare.

“A lot of businesses don’t train operators at all,” Mangan says. “They put these silly posters up that say ‘Safety First’ that nobody pays any attention to.”

Or if there is training, it’s simply done informally and takes the form of a more experienced operator teaching the new employee how to drive. That’s not good enough, Mangan says.

For forklift operators, he says, “Your life depends on what you learn.”

And for DC managers, effective safety programs can boost the bottom line. Fewer work-related accidents mean lower insurance costs and medical expenses, less downtime, and increased productivity.

Mangan offers the following advice for effective safety programs:

- Make your training specific to your site and your equipment. Be sure your training addresses the operating instructions and warnings for the types of truck your operators drive. And customize the training to account for your facility’s

surface conditions, the composition of the loads to be carried, pedestrian traffic in areas where the vehicle will be operated, and potentially hazardous environmental conditions.

- Take safety seriously. If a forklift operator routinely put loads in the wrong place, you’d fire him. But if an operator routinely breaks safety rules, most managers ignore the infraction.

Safety should be an integral part of the job, Mangan says, and you should strive to create a culture of safe operations.

OSHA steps up forklift enforcement in Southeast

The U.S. Department of Labor’s Occupational Safety and Health Administration is scrutinizing forklift safety in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, and Mississippi.

OSHA says the program aims to prevent deaths and serious injuries. The inspections will focus on the training operators receive, maintenance and repair, and whether the pathways the trucks travel ensure clear visibility or pose “struck-by” hazards.

Common maintenance problems include horns that don’t honk, bad brakes, and leaking hydraulics, says OSHA’s Benjamin Ross. OSHA’s so-called regional emphasis program began on May 29 and continues until Sept. 30, 2012.

Contact: Benjamin Ross, Occupational Safety and Health Administration, 678-237-0400, ross.benjamin@dol.gov.

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712 Main Street — Suite 187B • Boonton, NJ 07005
Phone: (973) 265-2300 • Email info@CustomerServiceGroup.com

“Safety training should never be treated as something a company needs to get over with, like a tedious chore,” he says.

Training programs should be conducted routinely, and you must provide retraining any time it becomes clear that operators don’t understand how to operate safely.

- Impose a speed limit. Mangan often sees forklift operators driving way too fast. Forklifts

are heavy, powerful machines and shouldn’t move any faster than a walking pace of about 4 mph. He says 5 mph to 6 mph is too fast.

- Never jump out of a tipping forklift. The most common reason for forklift fatalities is that operators try to bail out of a tipping truck, Mangan says. Train operators to stay in their seats if a truck falls.

Contact: Benjamin Mangan, MANCOMM, 563-499-1018, www.mancomm.com.

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