



Training

What You Need to Know Before Operating a Powered Industrial Truck

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Forklifts and other powered industrial trucks (PITs) can be adapted with a wide range of accessories to accomplish many tasks in a manufacturing setting. They can be ridden by a driver or guided by a walking operator. They can raise, lower or transport materials or lift a worker up to a convenient height.

Along with this valuable functionality, however, comes the possibility of serious accidents. In 2021, PITs were the No. 9 top ***Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) violation***. According to the National Safety Council, in 2020 forklifts were the source of ***78 work-related deaths*** and thousands of days away from work.

Improper operation of a PIT can endanger the driver and others in the workplace. For example, a heavy load could fall off a platform lift and injure the driver or a nearby person. A forklift loaded with packages might collide with a pedestrian. Or a forklift may roll off a loading dock. The hazards will vary widely depending on the type of PIT and the accessories used.

What Employers Need to Know

In addition to safety requirements for the vehicles themselves, the ***OSHA standard*** includes requirements for employers on implementing forklift training for employees. It's up to managers to ensure that each worker is competent to operate a PIT safely, as demonstrated by the successful completion of the training and evaluation specified in the standard.

Training must include formal instruction, such as in a classroom or online, and practical instruction on the equipment, including the truck and any attachments that will be used on the job.

When implementing a PIT operator training program, manufacturing companies should keep in mind these OSHA requirements:

- All operators of PITs must undergo training and obtain certification before their use
- Training must include formal instruction, such as in a classroom or online, and practical instruction on the equipment, including the truck and any attachments that will be used on the job
- Trainees may operate a PIT only under direct supervision of knowledgeable and competent trainers, and only where they cannot endanger themselves or other employees
- An evaluation of each operator's performance must be conducted at least once every three years
- Workers younger than 18 are not allowed to operate a forklift

In addition to recertification every three years, operators may be required to undergo refresher training if they have received an unsatisfactory evaluation, have been involved in an accident or near-miss incident, or have been observed to operate the vehicle in an unsafe manner. Refresher training should also be required when an operator is assigned to drive a different type of truck or in a workplace condition that has changed.

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What PIT Training Must Include

OSHA states that PIT training must cover all of the following topics, unless they are not applicable to the employer's workplace:

Truck-Related Topics (1910.178(l)(3)(i))

This section includes requirements for knowing:

- Operating instructions, warnings and precautions for the equipment that will be used on the job
- Differences between operating the truck and an automobile
- The vehicle's controls and instrumentation
- Engine or motor operation
- How to steer and maneuver the vehicle
- How to maintain visibility when operating the vehicle
- How to operate fork and attachment adaptations and the limitations of their use
- Capacity of the vehicle
- How to maintain stability of the vehicle
- How to perform inspection and maintenance of the vehicle
- How to refuel or recharge the vehicle
- Other instructions or precautions found in the vehicle's user manual

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Workplace-Related Topics (1910.178(l)(3)(ii))

The requirements of this section cover the environment in which the forklift will be operated, including:

- Surface conditions where the vehicle will be operated
- Composition and stability of loads to be carried
- Types of loads to be manipulated, including stacking and unstacking

- Pedestrian traffic where the vehicle will be operated
- Narrow or restricted areas where the vehicle will be operated
- Locations classified as hazardous where the vehicle will be operated
- Ramps or sloped surfaces that could affect stability of the vehicle
- Any environment that could allow buildup of carbon monoxide or diesel exhaust
- Any other unique or potentially hazardous workplace conditions that could affect safe operation

By setting and enforcing these standards for training operators of forklifts and other powered industrial trucks, OSHA strives to prevent or reduce the number of accidents that have caused so much death and so many lost work hours over the years.

What are the key elements of your company's training program for forklifts and other powered industrial trucks? Let us know in the comments below.

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