

TOOLBOX TALK

Forklift jibs are a common attachment that when fitted to a forklift expand its capabilities to become a multi-purpose lifting machine. Attachments are engineered to slide and secure easily to forklift tynes so that loads can be quickly attached to the hook at the end of the jib. They offer a practical materials handling solution, however each year forklifts continue to be associated with workplace injuries and deaths

Forklift Dangers

As forklifts must be manoeuvrable, they are designed to be compact. However, when carrying loads, they can become unstable. Fully laden, a standard two tonne forklift can weigh approximately five tonnes. With lower stability and greater manoeuvrability, combined with uncontrolled traffic areas in workplaces, you'll understand why forklifts are involved in so many incidents. Even at low speeds, forklifts can cause serious injuries and fatalities. It's not just the forklift operator who can be injured: pedestrians can be struck by a forklift or its load.

Forklift Risk Assessment

The following are common hazards:

Instability

Tipping over is the biggest danger for a forklift operator.

A forklift can tip over by rolling or overturning sideways, or by pitching forward when the back wheels lift off the ground. Forklifts can tip over if you:

- accelerate quickly in reverse
- brake too quickly, especially on a loaded forklift
- brake or accelerate while cornering
- brake or accelerate down a slope
- carry a load facing down a slope
- carry an unevenly balanced load
- collide with another vehicle
- drive with the tines raised too high (loaded or unloaded)
- use a forklift that is not designed to tow (pushing or pulling).

- drive across inclines or uneven ground, such as potholes (particularly with a height difference greater than 20mm across the front wheels)
- strike low doors or overhead structures
- turn too fast

Speed and stopping distances

Even at six kilometres per hour (i.e. walking pace) a forklift needs at least three metres to stop.

The distance at which a forklift can stop is affected by:

- the speed at which it is travelling
- the weight of the forklift and its load
- its mechanical and tyre condition the road or floor surface.

Sprains and strains

Sprains, strains, and other soft tissue injuries to the neck, back and arms can cause long-term health problem. Common hazards that injure forklift drivers include:

- continuously and/or repeatedly looking up during high stacking
- continuously and/or repeatedly looking behind while reversing
- repeatedly hitting bumps or driving on uneven surfaces
- using poorly positioned or poorly maintained controls

Slips, trips and falls

Slips, trips and falls are common injuries related to getting on and off forklifts.

Attachments

More specific skills are necessary for specialised forklift types, attachments, and worksite characteristics. There are so many different types of forklift attachments: Fork Positioners, Forklift Extension Slippers, Forklift Slip on Jib, Bale Clamp, Paper Roll Clamp, Rotating Clamp, Carpet Pole, and others.

When an attachment is fitted to a forklift, its operating characteristics may change, making it necessary to de-rate the forklift capacity and restrict some operating controls. Attachments must have rated capacities.

Where an attachment is used, an effective control method is stamping the combined rated capacity on the forklift load capacity plate. This may require adding an additional capacity plate. Make sure a competent person determines the rated capacity of the combination of the forklift and the attachment.

An attachment should only be used on a forklift if it has been specifically designed for that forklift

PCBUs must ensure that, where attachments are used, specific additional training is given to forklift operators and adequate supervision is provided.

Selecting attachments

Ask the manufacturer of the attachment whether it can be used safely on your forklift. Forklift attachments must be:

- designed by a 'competent person'
- manufactured by a 'competent person'
- safely used on the forklift.

Specific skills require additional training (e.g., before an operator starts using a forklift or an attachment that is different to the one used for training a gaining qualifications, further training and supervision is required).

Safety Tips

When using a forklift follow safe work practices such as:

- observing speed limits and warning signs
- wearing correctly fitted seat belts
- slowing down
- sounding the horn at an intersection or when others are around

The risk of forklift-related injuries can be reduced by having:

- check the jib and beams before use to ensure the jib is fitted to the forklifts tynes securely and will not come loose during operation.
- safe systems of work
- effective worker induction and training
- safe and well-maintained machinery
- a pedestrian and traffic management plan
- policies and procedures, such as for pre- and post-operation checking of forklifts and the workplace, using attachments, carrying loads)
- adequate information and supervision
- good record keeping
- an incident reporting process, including for near misses

Other issues you might consider include:

- managing fatigue
- manual handling
- battery charging
- fumes and gases
- noise.

