

Forklifts/Powered Industrial Trucks

Forklifts, also referred to as Powered Industrial Trucks (PIT)¹, are tremendously useful for several tasks because of their ability to move material in a variety of ways. However, forklifts can be dangerous machines – in 2017 there were 9,050 forklift-related injuries that caused an employee to be absent from work.² The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) show that the three most common forklift-related fatalities involve: A forklift that overturns; workers on foot being struck by forklifts; and workers falling from forklifts. Due to the risk of serious injury, forklift safety is regulated by federal and state agencies.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) Standards

The federal OSHA standards for forklifts (29 CFR 1910.178) require that:

- Forklift operators must be properly trained
- Forklifts must be inspected
- Forklifts must be maintained

Note: Other federal and state laws may also apply. Employers should consider consulting trade associations as well as a lawyer familiar with OSHA and state safety standards for additional information.

What Does this Mean for Employers?

Training

OSHA requires that all forklift operators be properly trained in accordance with specific OSHA training standards.

Employers can meet this requirement by either utilizing a qualified in-house associate(s) to conduct a compliant training program, or they can seek out a qualified vendor to provide such a program. At the end of this training, the employer must complete a written certification confirming the employee is properly trained to operate a forklift in accordance with OSHA standards. There are also requirements for refresher training under certain select circumstances relating to the unsafe operation of a forklift or a change in equipment or work environment. (Note: It is a violation of federal law for anyone under the age of 18 years old, regardless of training, to operate a forklift.)

Inspections

OSHA requires all forklifts to be examined at least daily and suggests a pre-operation inspection as well as an operational inspection. Inspection checklists must be retained so the employer can document inspection procedures to OSHA or other regulatory agencies, if necessary.

Maintenance

Any defects noted in the inspection process must be immediately noted by the employer and corrected. A forklift deemed unsafe must be removed from service and repaired only by authorized personnel. Maintenance records must be retained so the employer can document proper maintenance procedures to OSHA or other regulatory agencies, if necessary.

For More Information:

OSHA has a special “e-tool” website for powered industrial trucks:

[eTool :Powered Industrial Trucks \(Forklift\) | Occupational Safety and Health Administration \(osha.gov\)](https://www.osha.gov/eTool/PoweredIndustrialTrucks)

This site provides not only detailed information on requirements, but also best practices and maintenance checklists to help you develop a compliant program.

¹ A standard skid steer loader (SAE J1057) is not considered a PIT. However, a skid steer with a vertical mast (ANSI B56.6) is considered a PIT.
² US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017 Fatal Occupational Injuries by Primary and Secondary Source table.



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