

Health and Safety Bulletin

Forklift truck risks

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- Forklift truck risks

The HSE have recently successfully prosecuted a number of cases associated with forklift (FLT) accidents, so this newsletter focuses on the key risks associated with FLT's and uses some of these case examples to demonstrate the consequences of failing to manage them.

Workplace layout

Under the Workplace (Health Safety and Welfare) Regulations, sites should be designed and managed to allow both vehicles and pedestrians to move around safely. There is a significant risk of collisions, either between pedestrians and vehicles, or just involving vehicles, if traffic management is inadequate.

A farming company was recently prosecuted after the farm manager (who had worked for them for 38 years), was crushed and killed by a forklift truck as he walked from his car across a yard. The court heard that the company had failed to manage the area to keep pedestrians and trucks separate – in some cases allowing them to use the same entrance to agricultural buildings. The company was fined **£165,000** with **£39,500** in costs.

Another case resulted in the death of a FLT driver. His employer had not carried out a suitable risk assessment for their goods out area, allowing vehicles to park where the HGVs reversed. The accident occurred as the FLT driver was loading a trailer - an HGV reversed into him overturning his truck. The company were fined **£140,000** with **£22,657** in costs.

Tangerine Confectionary was successfully prosecuted after fork on a forklift truck pierced a worker's foot, entering the instep and exiting the bridge, breaking every bone. The employee was driving a ride-on pallet truck close to the warehouse entrance, because it was overcrowded with pallets from two other warehouses while maintenance work was being carried out. He was injured when another worker drove through plastic strip curtains (designed to keep out insects and birds) that hung down over the entrance, and the two vehicles collided. The plastic curtains obscured the view of workers going into the warehouse and the area. The injured worker is now only able to walk short distances with the use of a stick, and is unable to return to work or to drive. The company was fined **£120,000** with **£9,538** costs.

The HSE website describing best practise in the design of traffic routes can be found at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/workplacetransport/sitelayout.htm>.

Truck design/maintenance

It is vital that employer's select the right truck for their operations and also that they maintain them to an adequate standard. This includes carrying out statutory lifting equipment inspections, as well as regular servicing and daily inspections to ensure the safety devices on the truck are working effectively. The HSE has a website covering the selection of trucks at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/workplacetransport/checklist/section3.htm>.

The first case associated with these issues resulted in a young mechanic being crushed under a car weighing more than half a tonne when the chains on the forklift supporting it gave way. The company had failed to carry out an annual service on the forklift truck and it had numerous faults, including rusty lifting chains. The company

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was fined **£5,000** with **£6,000** costs.

In another example, which luckily did not result in personal injury, a company was fined **£3,000** with **£3,238** costs, when it was found to be using a truck that had not undergone a statutory inspection for over twelve months. Only six items out of 24 were marked "satisfactory" when it was examined with the remaining 18 items were classed as "repair needed."

Pickfords was recently prosecuted when a forklift truck reversed into a worker at an Essex site, causing three broken toes and a dislocation of the upper foot even though he was wearing safety boots. Not only did the company fail to enforce procedures to keep pedestrians away from trucks, the forklift truck involved had a broken reversing alarm, which had not been working for over a year. Pickfords were fined **£5,000** with **£1,415** costs.

Driver behaviour

Although engineering controls helps to reduce the risk of FLT accidents, on a day to day basis it is the attitude of employees (both drivers and pedestrians) in both following and enforcing safe systems of work that minimise the risks. The provision of training and effective supervision is vital.

Recent examples that demonstrate this include;

- An agency worker who was severely injured when the FLT he was driving overturned and crushed him - resulting in him having to have his spleen removed. Although the company controlling the site had previously received enforcement action from HSE and as a result had provided training to their own staff, it had not extended the requirement to agency workers. The injured worker had not been formally trained to drive a FLT and was not wearing a seatbelt when the accident happened. The company controlling the site were fined **£17,000** with **£10,985** costs
- A FLT driver was fined **£270** when prosecuted by the HSE and summarily dismissed by his employer after a teenager was seriously injured by a falling heater unit weighing almost half-a-tonne during a dangerous lifting operation. The driver managed to load the unit onto the forks of the truck, but noticed it was unstable and asked a passing colleague to help steady the load. The co-worker held it in place as best he could, but it slid off and fell, landing on top of him. The injured person suffered multiple fractures of his right shoulder, left shin bone and left ankle. The driver was still out of work on the date he was prosecuted, 11 months after the accident

The final example does not involve a FLT, but a digger. A digger driver was ordered to pay compensation of **£2,500** to an injured colleague and costs of **£1,554** after he hit him on the head with the digger bucket. The driver was talking on his mobile 'phone while operating the digger and did not notice the other worker – who sustained multiple fractures to his jaw as well as a punctured and collapsed lung as a result of the accident. He was hospitalised for ten days and did not return to work until 14 months later, still requiring further surgery on his jaw.



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