

### Forklift trucks on your site

Forklift trucks are amongst the most hazardous vehicles in a workplace, and the dangers are often underestimated. There are on average 1300 people hospitalised each year, with injuries including dislocations, amputations, other life changing injuries and fatalities. According to the British Safety Council there are no minor injuries involving a forklift truck; being hit by a forklift truck will be serious and often fatal. Pedestrians are most at risk accounting for 57% of all accidents involving a forklift truck.

The most common type of incidents involving a forklift truck, include, being struck, falling loads and overturning of the truck

Forklift trucks are heavy powerful machines that are inflexible; they can move at speed, they are relatively quiet and often operate in close proximity to other vehicles and pedestrians. Because of the way forklift trucks operate visibility is not always ideal, having picked up a load they will often reverse without warning. Forklift trucks are also not stable on uneven ground, on slopes or if the load is not well balanced; and these factors can result in the vehicle overturning resulting in serious injury to the operator.

When operating a forklift truck (FLT) in the workplace it is important:

- That safe systems of work are documented and known to the FLT operators;
- Only trained and authorised persons operate a FLT;
- There is adequate segregation between the FLT and pedestrians;
- Where persons are in the vicinity of a FLT the 3 meter rule is complied with;
- The FLT operator does not reverse until s/he has checked the surroundings;
- Speed limits are adhered to; a fast moving FLT will not stop easily;
- The FLT operator at all times uses the seat belt;
- No mobile devices or personal entertainment systems are allowed whilst operating a FLT;
- Ramps and uneven surfaces are avoided;
- Loads are balanced and within the maximum load capacity for the FLT being used.

### Transport – one of the major causes of accidents

Vehicles at any workplace site create a high risk of injury and damage, unless safe systems of work are in place and complied with. This includes segregation of vehicles and pedestrians, management of parking of the vehicles, controlling reversing and other manoeuvres, and enforcing who has authority to drive the vehicles once on site.

In a recent incident an experienced goods driver was killed when acting as an unskilled banks man. The driver of the goods vehicle was performing a blind side reversing manoeuvre and in doing so crushed the banks man.

In a statement in court, the driver of the goods vehicle said that he was performing the blind-side reverse because of the position of other vehicles in the yard and that it was not a manoeuvre that he would have chosen to perform. He added that a 'sloppy practice' had developed in the yard. The court heard that 60 drivers used the yard and they were exposed to risk as a result of substandard work practices. The company was fined £150,000 and order to pay costs of £235,000

A Traffic Management Plan is essential to having a safe operation within a workplace site. This needs to include who has access to the site; who has control over the vehicles; maximum speed limit, parking arrangements, procedures for reversing and other manoeuvres, and trained persons for assisting in reversing.

It is also important to ensure that there is good outside lighting covering the site; there are no obstructions and that the site is kept free of rubbish and waste. Where people will walk it is important that there are marked walkways to segregate pedestrians and vehicles and there are adequate warning signs to inform of hazards on the site, speed limited, reporting procedures etc.

## Noise is a risk and should not be ignored

Exposure to excessive noise can be one of the risks encountered by workers in the workplace and one that should not be ignored by employers.

The problem is that we have a propensity to get used to high levels of noise, plus the ear is poor at determining hazardous noise levels or changes in noise levels, even though exposure to excessive noise levels may be having an adverse effect on our hearing; as often this will not be immediately apparent and will develop over a period of time; by which time it will be too late to rectify.

The human ear responds to small changes in sound pressure. The ear is an intricate piece of human machinery that detects small pressure variations; it sends signals to the brain which in turn converts this to a recognisable sound. As with any mechanical machine, if it is subject to continuous or repeated high levels of pressure, the parts become damaged and less effective and the ear's ability to convert the pressure variations into signals for the brain to convert to a sound is less effective; resulting in hearing loss.

Hearing loss can be devastating for the individual, as it impacts on the person's social and work life, in particular the effect on communication and being able to hear others clearly or to enjoy music etc. It also has the tendency to isolate the individual because they feel that they cannot participate in events or discussions, and can be dangerous in the event of an emergency as they may not hear instructions or alarms. It can be a debilitating condition and often will result in tinnitus, a condition that constantly gives a ringing or buzzing in the ear. It is therefore important that exposure to noise, whether impact, regular, or continuous is not ignored and is controlled.

Why should an employer be concerned? Firstly as an employer you have a duty of care, and under the Health & Safety Act and the Noise in the Workplace Regulations you have a legal obligation to ensure that risks to health and safety from noise are eliminated or, where this is not reasonably practical, reduced to as low as reasonably practical. But also an employee who has suffered hearing loss, as a result of exposure to high noise levels in your workplace, is likely to make a claim for the damage caused.

Conducting workplace noise risk assessments requires knowledge and specialist equipment and therefore should be carried out by a competent person. In some workplaces it may be quite straightforward but in others it will need a good understanding of how and when individuals are exposed to noise.

Roger Silvers at H-ELP Systems has a Certificate of Competence in Workplace Noise Risk Assessments, issued by the Institute of Acoustics. We are now qualified to conduct your noise risk assessments and advise on ways to reduce noise levels, or where noise exposure cannot be sufficiently reduced, on ways to protect employees and others in the workplace.

## Compressed air

Compressed air is used in a wide range of manufacturing and industrial workplaces and is essential to many process operations.

However, it is important that the compressed air generator, the airline system and the tools are well maintained by a competent company and regularly inspected and tested, and that workers are instructed on its safe use and the potential hazards of using compressed air.

A user of an installed compressed air plant or mobile compressor equipment is subject to the legal requirements of the Pressure Systems Safety Regulations, legislation concerning the 'in-service' use of compressed air.

What are the hazards and risk of using compressed air?

Compressed air should not be used in confined spaces, or where the air can reflect back onto the person using it or any bystander and it should never be pointed directly towards the body.

Compressed air can have devastating consequences if the air comes into contact with the human body. For example, only 1bar of compressed air can blow an eye from its socket; air can enter the blood stream simply by being aimed at the body creating symptoms similar to a heart attack; and air entering the navel, even through a layer of clothing can inflate and rupture the intestines.

In addition, compressed air should not be used to clean work surfaces or equipment. It will create fine particles that can be a health hazard to the respiratory system, can cause eye injuries and with some substances, such as fine particles of wood or powder, it can cause an explosive atmosphere.

Do make sure that workers are trained and are aware of the dangers, the correct use of the equipment and when to report faults.