

# DEADLY Mistakes

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**Fatal Events:** On  
Jan. 16, 2006, a 48-

year-old forklift operator was seriously injured when the front wheel of a forklift hit a low spot in the ground, causing the vehicle to overturn.

**Investigative Findings:** The victim was using a rough terrain forklift to move materials around a construction site. The forks were positioned about 8 feet above the ground. As it made a turn around a building, the forklift hit a depression in the ground and tipped over on its right side. The victim was thrown from the vehicle and struck his head on what is called the rollover protective structure (ROPS), causing the employee severe head injuries. The forklift had a seat belt, but the operator was not using it at the time of the accident. The operator had received forklift training six years before from a previous employer. However, his current employer had not evaluated the employee to see if he was competent to operate a rough terrain forklift. The forklift safety manual instructed operators to fasten their seat belts and to not elevate the load except during stacking.

**Discussion:** In North Carolina, accidents involving forklifts and other types of powered industrial trucks continue to injure and kill workers in both general industry and construction. Four employees have died in the last two years from injuries related to forklift accidents. One forklift driver was killed after being hit by another vehicle. Another operator was killed when his forklift flipped over. A third driver died when he was pinned between a forklift and another object. In June 2005, a worker was killed after he was struck by a forklift. The forklift driver had been unable to see him because he had raised the load on the forks and obstructed his view.

Training is an essential part of accident prevention, regardless of the job being performed. When employees are trained properly, accidents are reduced or eliminated. Training is

especially important for new employees or for old hands who have been given new responsibilities or different tasks to perform. Classroom training should be coupled with specific practical application provided by a competent trainer.

## Recommendations:

- ✘ Employers should ensure that only fully trained operators are allowed to operate forklifts or other powered industrial trucks.
- ✘ Employees must complete a training program specified in the powered industrial truck standard before operating the vehicle.
- ✘ Refresher training must be provided when evidence indicates that equipment is not being operated in a safe manner or when an employee is assigned to a different piece of equipment.
- ✘ Forklift drivers should slow down and sound their horn at cross aisles and locations where vision is obstructed.
- ✘ Operators should keep a clear view of their path.
- ✘ Grades should be ascended or descended slowly and sharp turns at excessive speeds should be avoided.
- ✘ Forklifts should be equipped with rollover protection and seat belts should be worn.
- ✘ A safe distance must be maintained from the edge of ramps or platforms while on any elevated dock.
- ✘ When a vehicle is left unattended, the forks should be lowered, power should be shut off and brakes set.
- ✘ Consideration should be given to conditions that might affect the stability of the forklift and result in the vehicle overturning. Factors that affect stability include where the load is placed on the truck, the height of the load above the ground, and the vehicle's degree of lean.
- ✘ The equipment safety manual should be reviewed and followed.