

Cleaning a fork lift truck

Why clean?

Fork lift trucks are often used like a machine or tool, leaving it exposed to the elements that come with day to day operation. Caring for it by cleaning it properly will maximize the value you get out of your asset.

The main reasons you should properly wash your fork lift truck on a regular basis would be to prolong its lifespan, reduce the risk of faults occurring, help prevent premature component failure and maximise operational effectiveness.

Fork lift trucks have chains, cylinders, valves and seals, all of which are vulnerable to the ingress of dirt. This dirt can cause such components to deteriorate and fail prematurely. Premature failure leads to disruptive unscheduled maintenance and extra cost.

In addition, fork lift trucks that operate with or around corrosive materials will be exposed to possible damage to these components as well as the chassis, bodywork, cab etc.

Cleaning requirements

Consider investing in a proper washing bay that is equipped with a good quality pressure washer or steam cleaner. A pressure washer will save countless hours and allow more fork lift trucks to be cleaned.

Using a pressure washer is helpful when dealing with hazardous materials, but it is important to ensure that contaminants do not find their way into the water table through storm drains. Appropriate drainage, including an interceptor, should always be deployed.

Washing precautions

Keeping the fork lift trucks clean will reduce the exposure to risk. However, inappropriate cleaning may make the problem worse.

The main areas that need to be considered are:

- Do not pressure wash chains, they need to retain their lubrication to function. If they are cleaned care should be taken to ensure that the windscreen is not contaminated.
- Bearings, seals, gaiters and anything electrical are not designed for close contact with high pressure or steam cleaning equipment. Keep nozzles a good distance away.
- The sidewalls of pneumatic tyres can be damaged or weakened by high pressure water, especially if it is heated. Strong detergents and soaps may also cause damage.
- Use compressed air to clean a fork lift truck where you have a situation in which residue can mix with water and solidify. This can be the case when transporting products like cement. Using water to clean your forklift in these situations is not recommended.
- Substances that may be impossible to remove once hard or set, such as cement, and corrosive substances, such as salt, should be washed off as soon as possible after contact has been made.
- When cleaning the radiator with a pressure washer be sure to stand a good distance away, to avoid bending the fins on the radiator. As this can lead to overheating when next operated, which can cause serious damage.

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Remove loose objects first

Loose objects (e.g. dust, dirt, rust) should be removed first before water, cleaning products or a pressure washer are used. Start at the top of the truck and work your way down, brushing all loose objects in a downward motion, making cleaning more convenient and faster. Paying particular attention to the chassis, as a build-up here can damage the fork lift truck and cause problems in latter stages of its life.

Drying

The easiest and most effective way to dry a fork lift truck is by parking it outside. Leave it to stand until it is properly dry. If it's raining, park it under cover or use compressed air and a dry cloth to dry it. Only operate the forklift when you are sure that it is dry.

Cleaning products

Water, soap and residue that comes off of a fork lift truck while washing, ends up going somewhere. Use cleaning products that aren't toxic to the environment, if you do use any toxic cleaning agents then ensure you handle and dispose of them the correctly.

This Fact Sheet does not fully cover the environmental issues that will arise from the cleaning of fork lift trucks. Contaminants may be produced and advice should be sought from the local Environmental Health Office on regulations and containment methods.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

To avoid coming into contact with hazardous or toxic chemicals while cleaning a fork lift truck, it is essential to ensure that the correct PPE is provided - and utilised! As a bare minimum, eye protection, safety helmet, waterproof clothing, including gloves and nonslip footwear, should be used when cleaning a fork lift truck.

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The information in this Fact Sheet has been assembled and interpreted to give truck owners and users basic guidance on frequently asked questions. Further important information will be given in the quoted reference documents. Responsibility for meeting the safety obligations discussed rests with the employer, and the UKMHA will not accept liability for any problem arising as a result of the content of this document. Technical Bulletins, containing more detailed information and updated as appropriate, are made available free to members of the **UKMHA SAFE USER GROUP**.

Published by UKMHA – UK Material Handling Association

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