

FORKLIFT SAFETY:

Are loading bays risky business?



Loading bays are dangerous settings for workplace transport operations. Tim Waples, Chief Executive of the Fork Lift Truck Association, examines why this is the case, and offers advice on how those responsible for safety can reduce risk.

As an area that brings together the HSE's three most dangerous forms of workplace transport (forklift trucks, LGVs and HGVs) with workers on foot, it's not surprising that loading bays are where one in four workplace transport accidents occur.

Accidents involving forklift trucks often have life-changing results, with workers crushed, trapped or falling from vehicles. Most regrettably, many of these events could have been avoided through the implementation of simple procedural and/or structural changes to sites.

Assess the risks yourself

As an employer, it is your duty — by law — to control workplace risks. Risk assessments enable you to identify the risks, as well as the sensible and proportionate measures to negate them.

Monitoring your loading bay activities, including those involving visiting vehicles, over a sustained period, allows you to develop a better understanding of how vehicles and pedestrian traffic are interacting in your loading bay area.

While observation can be done in person, we have heard from some companies who have found that recording video footage has proved effective in observing current practice and identifying potential issues.

Who is most at risk?

Workers on foot are most at risk in forklift truck accidents: accounting for 57 percent of all serious injuries.

Regardless of whether you're a manager, supervisor, forklift truck driver, warehouse operative or an office worker on a site where lift trucks operate, this statistic is directly relevant to you and your job.

It is one you should keep in mind when going about your daily tasks, whether you're exploring ways to improve safety, operating lift trucks or simply walking close to areas where trucks are operating.

Segregation is key

The number one way of improving site safety and removing risk is to segregate or physically separate on-foot or pedestrian traffic from the routes taken by lift trucks.

This can be done in a number of effective ways, including:

- Painting segregated traffic routes on the loading area floor
- Using raised kerbs to separate the two traffic routes
- Installing elevated walkways
- Using crash-proof barriers

- Installing blue light warning systems on trucks or doorways
- Introducing proximity alarms on forklift and pallet trucks
- Implementing one-way systems to reduce the need for vehicles to reverse
- Establishing waiting areas or holding pens for lorry drivers during loading/unloading



Alongside this, managers could consider changes to practice such as:

- Safety awareness training courses for operators and other site staff
- Excluding pedestrians from loading areas where practicable
- Enforcing speed limits for trucks working near pedestrians
- Prohibiting the use of mobile phone
- Using banksmen direct and supervise vehicle movement

Regardless of what changes you make, managers must restrict workers on foot from lift truck traffic routes and enforce these rules strictly and consistently. Doing this reinforces the message and instils a culture of safety on foot.

Every loading bay is different and likely to present unique hazards and risks. However, a well-designed and maintained loading bay with suitable segregation of vehicles and people — that is policed by management — will make a significant difference to the safety of your operations.



Best practice: Heineken

Brewer Heineken won the FLTA Safe Site Award 2016 for its team's efforts to improve workplace safety for 230 employees at its 70-acre brewing site at its Hereford Cider Mills location.

The company was recognised for a range of improvements, including its work reducing risk in the loading bay.

The team leading the project nurtured a culture of reporting which ensured hazards were addressed.

Alongside this, blue light technology was introduced to trucks so that pedestrians would be alert to truck movements.

In addition, managers videoed and reviewed its loading bay operations. This enabled them to identify a range of improvements — including the replacement of old signage and mirrors to addressing communication

between forklift operators and lorry drivers.

In the loading bays the company opted to segregate forklift trucks from workers on foot (including LGV drivers) by creating 'red zones', using anti-slip paint on the bay floor.

When pedestrians are in the 'red zone', forklift trucks cannot enter. Instead, they must until the red zone is clear. Alongside this, holding pens were introduced so that lorry drivers — waiting for their trucks to be loaded — could be kept safely away from lifting operations.

For more guidance and information on any of the above, or to view the Association's publicly available fact sheets, visit www.fork-truck.org.uk or call 01635 277577.