



Forklift Operator Pre-use checks

Forklifts can be dangerous machines. If not maintained properly, there is a risk of injury or death. This information sheet outlines what must be done to keep forklifts safe and fit for purpose.

What the law requires

If you own, lease, hire or borrow a vehicle for work purposes, you must make sure that it is safe for use and fit for the purpose for which it is intended. Under Health and Safety Legislation, a vehicle is a place of work. The law requires that workplaces are maintained in a condition that is safe and without risk to safety and health. So, vehicles must be kept safe and fit for purpose and the driver must be able to get in and out of the vehicle safely. Employers must make sure that drivers are familiar with the vehicle they are driving and that they have been given appropriate instruction, information, and training to carry out required pre-checks and operate the forklift in the correct and safe manner. Employers must undertake routine preventative maintenance to keep forklifts in safe working condition as per the manufacturer's instructions.

Employers must also make sure that they have a defect reporting system in place so that when defects are found that they are rectified in a timely manner. Drivers should never be required to drive under conditions that are unsafe or that do not comply with the law. Forklifts are subject to statutory examination by a competent person once in every period of twelve months in accordance with S.I. 299 of 2007 (Safety, Health and Welfare at Work [General Application] Regulations 2007). If the forklift is used to lift persons, a six-monthly check is required. A system should be established for reporting defects and ensuring that remedial work is carried out. A planned routine maintenance system should include:

- Daily pre-checks of tyres, brakes, reversing alarm, flashing beacon etc. by the driver at the beginning of each shift.
- Maintenance as per the manufacturer's instructions
- Checks by a qualified and competent engineer following any major repair, modification, or accident.

Daily pre-checks

Most faults can be found and fixed if the operator carries out a forklift pre-check before use. The pre-check only takes a few minutes. It makes sure that obvious defects that could affect forklift safety and the safety of others are identified.

Business benefits

The price of correcting unexpected vehicle failure is always higher than the cost of preventing that failure in the first place. Well maintained forklifts have both business and safety benefits. Forklifts that are well maintained and regularly checked:

- Are more reliable.
- Are cheaper to run.
- Have higher residual value.

The direct business benefits are:

- Less downtime.
- More reliable customer service.
- Longer forklift lifespan and reliability.

Safety benefits include:

- Improved operator safety
- Safer operator working environment (workplace)
- Reduced likelihood of injuries to the operator and pedestrians in the vicinity of the forklift.

Preventative maintenance

All employers and owner-operators should put in place a forklift preventative maintenance system. The aim of the system is to identify any forklift defects, damage or problems at an early stage before they become a safety issue or a major cost. As well as causing serious accidents, neglecting to maintain a forklift can result in the breakdown of the machine and unscheduled stoppages to the work process.

Forklift pre-checks are a crucial part of the preventative maintenance system. The operator is often the first person to notice if there is a problem. Therefore, operator pre-checks should be incorporated into daily work routines before commencing work with the forklift. It is recommended that employers prepare their own forklift checklist to take account of the type and level of use.

As a forklift operator, by law, you must make sure that the forklift you drive is maintained and used so that it is unlikely to cause a danger to anyone. If specific items are checked daily, it will help to identify obvious vehicle defects. When conducting pre-checks, it is important for the operator to follow a routine so that nothing is overlooked. When conducting the checks, a high visibility vest or jacket should be worn, and caution should be taken to look out for other vehicles. People being hit or run over by forklifts is one of the main causes of workplace death. Injuries caused by forklifts are generally very serious because of the size and weight of the machines.

Each operator must be satisfied that their forklift is safe to operate and free from defects. Any defects should be recorded and reported to the employer or responsible person so that appropriate action can be taken. Any safety critical defects must be rectified before the forklift is used.

Operator pre-check

A reliable and documented system of daily or pre-shift checks is the cornerstone of good preventative maintenance. This ensures that essential fluids are kept topped up and potential defects are identified before they become a problem. Maintenance and checks should be carried out in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. A checklist as per the sample attached can be used to make sure that the daily/takeover checks are carried out and defects reported and repaired. It is recommended that the forklift is checked in a clockwise/ anti-clockwise direction covering the following main visual & operational items:

- Forks, carriage plate, mast, lift chain.
- Lights, windscreen, and mirrors (if fitted)
- Wheels, tyres
- Energy source (gas, diesel, electric battery)
- Hydraulics
- Instruments
- Operator's compartment; including Seat Belts (Driver Restraint)

- ✓ Carry out pre-checks in a safe area away from passing vehicles and pedestrians.
- ✓ Check that the forklift is sitting square and not leaning to one side. Check that the driver's mirrors are clean, secure and not damaged. Check that the wheels are in good condition with no cracks or damage and that they are secure.
- ✓ The tyres are the only parts of a forklift that are always in contact with the ground. They provide grip for movement, friction for braking and suspension for safety and comfort. The correct tyres in good condition are an essential aid to safe and efficient operations. The wrong tyres for the application or tyres that are in poor condition or excessively worn, are a potentially dangerous and expensive hazard. Is there any damage to the tyres, such as bulges, cracks, cuts or tears?
- ✓ Check the vehicle bodywork for damage. Make sure that body panels are secure and not liable to fall off.
- ✓ Make sure that all forklift access is in good condition and is clean and secure, including steps. Check that there is nothing present that could cause someone to slip or trip when getting into or out of the forklift. Good housekeeping is essential.
- ✓ Make sure that the seat and steering wheel are set for comfort, posture and safety and that all controls can be easily reached.
- ✓ Check your driving lights.
- ✓ Forklifts have chains, hydraulic cylinders, valves, and seals, all of which are vulnerable to the ingress of dirt of any description. This dirt may cause such components to deteriorate and fail prematurely. Premature failure leads to disruptive unscheduled maintenance and extra cost.
- ✓ Check that there is good all-round visibility. For example, is vision obstructed by any stickers or pendants? Check that the cab interior is clean and that there are no loose items which could cause injury if the need to brake in an emergency arose. Do the lights, horn and warning systems all operate correctly?
- ✓ Check that all instruments, gauges, and warning devices are operating correctly and following their correct sequence. If any warning lights remain on after start-up, report them; don't ignore them.
- ✓ Before driving the vehicle, check that the steering and brakes are working correctly.

Recording of defects

Record and report any defects in accordance with the company defect reporting systems.

Remember: any safety-critical items must be repaired, or the forklift must be taken out of service.

Records of all checks, repairs and services should be kept for the forklift. Analysis of the records may highlight a pattern or history of recurring defects or poor maintenance repair standards.