

Forklift Safety

Training requirements and helpful tips



A forklift is a powerful tool that allows one person to precisely lift and place large, heavy loads with little effort. However, there is a great risk of injury or death when a forklift operator has not been trained.

Must employees be trained?

Yes. All employees operating a forklift must be trained. The training consists of three elements: formal (general, classroom-type) training, practical (site-specific, hands-on) training and a visual evaluation of the operator's skill.

Does an employer have to hire a professional trainer to give the training?

No. Anyone who has the knowledge, training and experience to train and evaluate forklift operators can conduct the training.

Can an employer develop their own training program?

Yes. An employer can develop their own program using, for example, WISHA Codes, Forklift Safety Guide, videos, an owner's manual review, or a hands-on training session. Additionally, the trainer would observe the operator and evaluate their ability to safely operate the forklift. Topics that must be covered during training and evaluation are listed on the back of this fact sheet.

Does the employee have to be evaluated after being trained?

Yes. After completing the classroom and hands-on training, the employee must demonstrate the skills learned. An evaluator designated by the employer must visually evaluate these skills. Additionally, all employees must be evaluated every three years to ensure that they are still operating the forklifts in a safe manner.

Does training have to be documented?

Yes. The employer must keep a record of forklift training and the evaluation. The record includes the name of the operator, date of the training, date of evaluation and the name of the person(s) giving the training and evaluation.

Does training from a previous employer count?

Yes and no. Training received from a previous employer can meet the general, classroom-type training requirement, if such training was appropriate to the forklift and working conditions encountered and if the operator was evaluated and found competent to operate the forklift safely within three years. However, the current employer is still responsible for site-specific hands-on training for the specific forklift that the employee will be using. Additionally, the current employer is required to observe and evaluate the employee's ability to safely operate the forklift. Both the training and the evaluation have to be documented. (Sample on back of this form.)

Is a license or certification required to operate a forklift?

No. There is no license requirement for forklift operators but the employer must document that the operator has completed the following training:

- General forklift operation and safety information (topics listed on the back of this form)
- Workplace-specific training, including practice on the type of forklift the operator will actually be using (topics listed on the back of this form)
- An evaluation of the operator's skill and ability to operate the forklift safely. Remember to document the training!



Division of Occupational Safety and Health



www.Lni.wa.gov/safety-health



1-800-423-7233



Washington State Department of
Labor & Industries

These topics must be covered when training or evaluating a forklift operator.

Employers must document that employees have been trained and/or evaluated in all the topics listed below. Use of this checklist for that purpose is optional.

General Forklift Topics

- Operating instructions, warnings and precautions for types of industrial truck the operator will be authorized to operate.
- Differences between the forklift and an automobile.
- Vehicle controls and instrumentation: where they are located, what they do and how they work.
- Engine or motor operation.
- Steering and maneuvering.
- Visibility (including restrictions due to loading).
- Fork and attachment adaptation, operation and use limitations.
- Vehicle capacity.
- Vehicle stability.
- Vehicle inspection and maintenance that the operator will be required to perform.
- Refueling and/or charging and recharging of batteries.
- Operating limitations.
- Other operating instructions, warnings or precautions listed in the operator's manual for the types of vehicles that the employee is being trained on.

Workplace-Specific Topics

- Surface conditions where the vehicle will be operated.
- Composition of loads to be carried and load stability.
- Load manipulation, stacking and unshackling.
- Pedestrian traffic where the vehicle will be operated.
- Narrow aisles and other restricted places where the vehicle will be operated.
- Hazardous (classified) locations where the vehicle will be operated.
- Ramps and other sloped surfaces that could affect the vehicle's stability.
- Closed environments and other areas where insufficient ventilation or poor vehicle maintenance could cause a buildup of carbon monoxide or diesel exhaust.
- Other unique or potentially hazardous environmental conditions in the workplace that could affect safe operation.
- Retraining required if changes in workplace conditions could affect safe operation (such as: new trenches, new worker access routes or new staging areas on construction sites).

Name of Operator: _____

Date of Formal Training: _____ Name of Trainer: _____

Date of Practical Training: _____ Name of Trainer: _____

Date of Evaluation: _____ Name of Evaluator: _____

We can help

Employers: We offer workplace safety and health consultations, risk management assessments, training and technical assistance at no cost. For more information, go to Lni.wa.gov/safety-health/preventing-injuries-illnesses/request-consultation.

Employee/employee representatives: You may file a formal complaint when you believe a safety

or health hazard exists in your workplace. Go to Lni.wa.gov/workers-rights/workplace-complaints/safety-complaints for information in English and Spanish.

A training program covering general forklift information is available on the L&I website at Lni.wa.gov/safety-health/safety-training-materials/online-safety-training.

For more information, visit Lni.wa.gov/safety-health/safety-topics/search-by-topic and type the word "forklifts".