

# INDUSTRY ALERT

## INJURY

### *Forklift operator injured when his vehicle collides with another forklift*

#### What happened?

On the night shift in a plywood mill, one forklift truck was unloading in the press area, where sheets are glued, while another forklift was coming up the main aisle from the dryer with a bundle of sheets for gluing. When the operator of the forklift that was unloading shifted into reverse, his vehicle collided with the oncoming forklift. The operator of the reversing vehicle suffered a lost-time strain injury to his neck.

#### Why did it happen?

The operator of the forklift who was coming up the aisle with a bundle of sheets failed to warn the operator of the other vehicle by sounding the horn. A potential secondary factor in the incident was the presence of two rows of bundles left in the main aisle by a forklift operator from the previous shift.

#### How can it be prevented?

This incident highlights three of the main hazards lift truck operators face in their work:

- 1. Other vehicles nearby.** The operation of more than one forklift in the same general area increases the severity of all other hazards related to workplace conditions and operator competency. Operators of the vehicles need to be aware of the location of the other vehicles at all times, and they must make their presence known to their fellow operators by sounding the horn or using the help of a signaller.
- 2. Intersections and blind spots.** Forklift operators must slow down and sound the horn at cross aisles and in any other situation where their vision is obstructed or they may not be visible to the operator of another forklift or a worker on foot. The operator should always look toward the travel path and have a clear view of it. If the operator does not have a clear view, a signaller who has been instructed in a code of signals for managing traffic in the workplace must be used.
- 3. Housekeeping.** Work areas should be inspected regularly to identify any hazards and conditions that could endanger forklift operators or their co-workers. Obstructions and overly congested areas must be dealt with promptly.

A Ministry of Labour study of lift truck incidents found that the three main causes are poorly trained workers, inadequate supervision and poor work/workplace organization. After this incident, the company responded by providing forklift training to all operators, lowering the height of corner bundles to improve operator sightlines, and enforcing a requirement that main aisles be kept unobstructed at all times.

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