

## Fasten Those Forklift Seat Belts

**Forklift operators should wear seat belts. Why?** Analysis of forklift accidents reveals that the operators who were injured or killed were often not wearing seat belts. While seat belts can't prevent accidents, they can prevent serious injuries and save lives. Here are three real accident reports that tell the story:

- An employee was using a forklift to move waste material into a large, drive-in waste Dumpster on the company's outdoor loading dock. He'd just dumped a load and was backing out of the Dumpster when he backed off the side of the loading dock, falling just under 4 feet to the pavement below. Since he wasn't wearing a seat belt, he was thrown from the forklift and was crushed under the truck's rollover cage. He died 9 days later.
- An employee was driving an unloaded forklift down a ramp with a 13 percent slope when the forklift started to tip over. The operator attempted to jump clear, and the rollover protective structure (ROP) landed on him and killed him. The employee was not wearing the supplied seat belt.
- A forklift operator drove his truck down a ramp rapidly and appeared to be attempting to make a sharp left turn. The forklift overturned. Apparently, the employee was unaccustomed to the quickness and sharp turning radius of the new forklift. He was also not wearing the provided seat belt, and when he fell from the seat, his head was caught under the overhead protective cage.

**What OSHA says about forklifts and seat belts.** Here's a direct quote:

"OSHA's enforcement policy on the use of seat belts on powered industrial trucks is that employers are obligated to require operators of powered industrial trucks that are equipped with operator restraint devices, including seat belts, to use the devices. CSHOs [Compliance Safety and Health Officers] will enforce the use of such devices under Section 5(a)(1) of the OSH Act."

### Why It Matters...

- As with any other kind of vehicle accident, wearing a seat belt while operating a forklift can minimize injuries and save lives.
- The safest place for a forklift operator to be in the event of a rollover is strapped into his or her seat, protected by the ROP.
- In case after case, investigators of forklift fatalities almost always list, "Ensure that all workers wear seat belts on forklifts" as one of the recommendations for preventing future accidents.

**Getting operators to wear their seat belts--easier said than done!** Some common complaints from operators are that the seat belts are restricting and that it's easy to forget to put the belt on when they have to get in and out of a truck a lot. Keep in mind that you are likely to hear the same kinds of excuses you get from employees who fail to use other kinds of required PPE. So use the same type of approach when combating those objections. For example:

- Tell forklift operators that they're required to use seat belts, and enforce your policy the way you do all your other safety rules. (Lax enforcement of seat belt rules is frequently cited as an important reason so many operators fail to use them.)

- Recount stories like the ones above, and if you can, use pictures of one of these accidents. Some employees may scoff, but that ugly picture is going to stick with them somewhere in the back of their minds--and it might just make them snap on the belt.
- Remind them that no matter how much a nuisance wearing a seat belt might be, it's worth it to ensure that they can go home to their families and friends safely.

Of course, another option is to refit your forklifts with seat belts that won't allow the operator to start up the forklift unless the belt is buckled. For a modest per-truck cost, you can improve compliance. But you still have to monitor, because operators can just buckle the belt and sit on it. So you still have to get them to see the importance of wearing a seat belt. And then you've got to keep a sharp eye on them to make sure they always do.

Article by [BLR](#)