

FATAL ALERT

July 7, 2006

A forklift operator was working at a large distribution center, moving product at the end of his shift, when he had difficulties operating a Reach Forklift and struck a steel rail system. The operator had been moving stock during his shift like he normally did and during his last pallet pick he noticed the steering seemed loose. He made a mental note to report the problem at the end of his shift and started to make his last drop off. The operator saw another coworker heading in his direction so he stopped and backed up and signaled the coworker through the area as he proceeded to go around the side of the other operator. He then turned around and was coming from a different angle and all of a sudden for reasons he couldn't understand, the Reach Forklift went into a spin and it hit a piece of a guard rail system. It then spun back around and that's when he came out of the forklift and was pinned/crushed between the guardrail and the Reach Truck. The operator received severe crushing trauma to both legs and there was uncontrolled bleeding from one leg. Coworkers immediately were called and administered first aid, saving the operator's life. He was transported by ambulance to the local hospital and then transferred to a hospital in Colorado for specialized care. The operator ended up losing one leg as a result of the accident.

Significant Factors:

- The employee was at the end of the shift and stated to coworkers he was in a hurry and still had one last drop to make.
- The employee stated he noticed a problem with the Reach Truck on his last pickup and didn't immediately report the problem to a Team Leader or to maintenance.

Findings/Observations:

- The employee stated there was a steering malfunction of the Reach Truck.
- The Reach Truck had just received maintenance four days prior to the accident.
- After the accident, the company had the Reach Truck immediately pulled from use and had their maintenance personnel check the unit. Also, they had a manufacturers representative come and check the unit out. Both inspections showed no signs of mechanical malfunction.
- All employees interviewed stated the company had a formal and on-the-job training program for operating forklifts. All units are to be checked at the beginning of each shift or use. All problems are to be reported to Team Leaders or maintenance immediately.
- It was noted that forklifts had numerous scratches and rubs on the painted surfaces indicating that the units were making contact with other items routinely.
- It was noted during the investigation, that vehicles seemed to be operating at high rates of speed.

Recommendations:

- Brief all employees on the facts and circumstances of this mishap.
- Ensure all employees immediately stop using any piece of equipment that is not functioning properly and report it to management.
- Employer re-evaluates current incident/accident reporting procedures to ensure all accidents/incidents are reported/investigated.
- Assess the forklift vehicles' speed limits for potential speed reduction to ensure they are operated as safely as possible.