

FORKLIFT SAFETY - ELEVATING PERSONNEL SAFELY

Forklifts (or powered industrial trucks) were never intended by manufacturers as a means of lifting personnel to perform job tasks at heights. Through the years, however, it became apparent, as evidenced by the number of injuries occurring, that this was, indeed, a method being employed for getting to light fixtures, top storage racks, elevated motors and other items too high to reach from the floor or from a ladder. It was viewed as a quicker way to accomplish tasks. Instead of going to the storage area and retrieving a ladder, riding the forks to the upper level would take less time--that is, if you didn't count the time you were off work or in the hospital recovering from injuries because you fell.

In an attempt to reduce this exposure, regulatory groups, manufacturers and other interested parties decided that developing a "*safe method*" of elevating personnel would be the best course of action.

Presently, forklifts may be used to lift personnel *only* if the following guidelines are followed:

- A work platform equipped with standard guardrails or equivalent means, and firmly secured to the lifting carriage or forks, must be used.
- The hydraulic system must be so designed that the lift mechanism will not drop faster than 135 feet per minute in the event of a failure in any part of the system.
- An operator must attend the lift equipment while workers are on the platform.
- The operator must be in the normal operating position while raising or lowering the platform.
- The vehicle must not travel from point to point with the work platform elevated at a height greater than 4 feet while workers are on the platform. When necessary, at heights greater than 4 feet, inching is permitted provided it is done at a very slow speed.
- The area between workers on the platform and the mast must be guarded to prevent contact with chains or other shear points.
- A safe and adequate access/egress must be provided for workers entering and exiting the work platform.