

TOOLBOX TALK #31

OPERATOR CRUSHED BETWEEN FORKLIFT AND RACKING

A 54-year-old forklift operator and his co-worker were installing large metal storage racks in a warehouse. The operator was using a forklift to raise the racks so leveling shims could be installed under the uprights, while the co-worker drilled anchor holes in the floor.



The operator parked the forklift, shut off the engine, set the parking brake and exited the forklift – leaving the forks raised about 39 inches. Unknowingly, he had parked on top of the cord of his co-worker’s drill. In an attempt to free the cord, the co-worker got in the forklift, started the engine and put it in gear. He did not know how to release the parking brake, so the operator reached into the cab and released it. Once the brake released, the forklift started moving forward toward the metal racks.

The co-worker swerved to avoid the racks, crushing the operator between the rear of the forklift and one of the metal uprights. The co-worker panicked and jumped from the forklift, which came to a stop when its forks ran into a wall. The operator was transported to a hospital and pronounced dead a short time later.

Investigators found that neither worker had completed a required operator training program before operating the forklift. The operator had received on-the-job training and was authorized by the employer to operate the forklift, but the co-worker was neither trained nor authorized.

To help prevent similar occurrences, employers should:

- Instruct unauthorized workers never to operate forklifts, even if only for a short time. Likewise, instruct authorized operators to prevent unauthorized workers from operating them.
- Train workers to identify and evaluate unexpected situations not specifically addressed in job hazard analyses, control the hazards safely if possible, and check with a supervisor if the hazard cannot be controlled or if they have questions.