



Hundreds injured annually from forklift violations

MOL repeating forklift blitz in February 2010

Hundreds of workers in Ontario are seriously injured or killed by mobile equipment each year, with the average forklift-related claim resulting in 67 days lost from work. From 2003 to 2007, 13 people died from incidents involving lifting devices and forklift trucks. No wonder the MOL has forklift safety in its sights. Here's a primer on its ["zero tolerance" inspection blitz](#) slated for February 2009. Find out what to expect, and how to avoid common pitfalls.

First, let's define the scope

"Forklifts" and "lift devices" are the most common terms used for powered industrial trucks used to lift and move material. Included in this group are everything from low lift powered pallet trucks to walkie stackers, reach trucks, order pickers, scissor lifts and indoor and outdoor counter-balanced equipment – all of which can injure or kill. The MOL will also look at lifting devices like vehicle hoists.

What the results of last winter's blitz can teach us

According to the [results posted on its forklift blitz](#), the MOL visited 1,295 firms in February 2009, and issued over 3,000 orders related to mobile equipment hazards, including 192 stop-work orders. **Vehicle sales and service firms** had a higher than expected number of orders (more than nine per cent of the total), many related to vehicle hoists. Of all orders issued during the blitz, more than 61 per cent were related to these three priorities:

1. Lifting device inspections and maintenance;
2. Operation of the lifting device by a competent person;
3. Safe work environment (e.g. pedestrian traffic, guarding, eyewash fountains, hazard-free floors, etc.).

What to expect

At the time of writing, the MOL guidelines for the forklift blitz in February 2010 had not been published; however, MOL's 400 inspectors typically follow:

- [The MOL Guideline for the Safe Operation and Maintenance of Powered Lift Trucks](#)
- The [Canadian Standards Association](#) Safety Standard for Lift Trucks B335-04.

Inspectors will likely be looking for evidence of compliance related to the same three priorities identified during the MOL's forklift blitz last winter:

1. *Lifting device inspections and maintenance:*
 - Inspection and maintenance by a competent person of all mobile equipment, including vehicle lifts in vehicle service shops;
 - Rigorous adherence to the manufacturer's maintenance and inspection procedures for all models of forklift trucks (any lifting mechanism has to be inspected every year at a minimum, more often if you're running back-to-back shifts).

2. *Operation of the lifting device by a competent person:*
 - Adequate training for workers who operate lift trucks—on the specific class of equipment they are operating;
 - Adequate training and competence on the part of supervisors who supervise forklift operations;
 - Temp workers being held to the same strict standards as permanent employees.
3. *A safe work environment:*
 - A pedestrian safety program in place and implemented;
 - Appropriate personal protective equipment being used for changing and charging batteries, exchanging propane cylinders, refueling lift trucks, etc.;
 - Safety equipment, such as fall protection and seat belts, in use and in good working order;
 - Pre-shift inspection and recording procedures in place.

Beware the training certificate pitfall

MOL inspectors will be looking for proof of adequate training. Here's the rub: just because a new hire presents a certificate, doesn't mean that person has had adequate training. Unfortunately, many trainers offer programs that consist of nothing more than a light touch; e.g. a quickie seminar, a video, and no operating tests. What inspectors may require is evidence of thorough training, including program content and copies of written and operating exams. Also, in the event you do have an incident, they'll expect immediate access to your complete set of records.

That said, what's truly important for employers—who are ultimately responsible for making sure people operating lifting devices are trained and competent—is *evidence* of competence. Supervisors should have a documented process in place that proves they've asked employees to demonstrate their skills before they're allowed to operate the vehicle.

A note about your bottom line

Almost all damage to all facility and product is caused by the misuse of lift trucks. As employers know only too well, putting even a small dent in a racking system can cost thousands of dollars, given that minor damage to, say, the critical bottom sections could mean replacement of that section, and more serious damage could cause a complete system collapse. Other costs include those associated with terminating repeat offenders, and recruiting and training new operators. Hiring qualified operators from the get-go, and implementing rigorous refresher training programs, are strategies that will save money in the long run.

For more information

Through its amalgamation with Industrial Accident Prevention Association (IAPA), OSSA can offer significant collective experience and expertise in the areas of:

- Expert advice, resource and tools to help you establish and manage your forklift program including [two self-assessment for lifting devices and forklifts](#) ;
- Third party assessments with recommendations to improve your program;
- Training support—[video-based](#) and [classroom-based](#)—to help you train your operators to CSA standards.

[Call now](#) to get your ducks in a row before the February 2010 blitz.

Here are the links:

Results posted on its forklift blitz:

http://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/hs/sawo/blitzes/blitz_report6.php

MOL Guideline for the Safe Operation and Maintenance of Powered Lift Trucks:

<http://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/hs/pubs/liftrucks/>

Canadian Standards Association: <http://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/hs/pubs/csa/>

IAPA Self-assessments: <http://www.iapa.ca/Main/Resources/irsst.aspx>

Video-based training: <http://www.ossa.com/OSSA2007/LiftHoist.aspx>

Classroom-based training: <http://www.iapa.ca/Catalog/EventDetails.aspx?id=60>

Call now: <http://www.ossa.com/content/contactUs/>