



BACK TO BUSINESS: FORKLIFT TRUCK SAFETY IN THE ERA OF COVID-19

In a matter of weeks, the world changed. Sports leagues came to an abrupt halt, schools closed and businesses shutdown across the country. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and efforts to flatten the curve and combat the spread left only select, essential businesses open to provide critical supplies and services.

On the front lines, supply chains persevered through uncertainty. Even in the face of cases climbing higher, a shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE) and an explosion of e-commerce orders, essential workers kept store shelves stocked and deliveries moving.

Materials handling operations had to keep moving – but with the utmost caution to protect personnel based on guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).



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A few months later, and it's time to hit the reset button on business. Companies are ready to get back to work, but doing so successfully while accounting for the lasting impact of COVID-19, requires a collective effort, adopting best practices for health and hygiene at every level.

Lessons learned during the initial months of the pandemic are informing how warehouses, distribution centers and other facilities manage their lift truck operations as economies re-open. From daily operation to service calls, personnel interact with lift trucks in several ways, all of which can risk virus transmission without proper sanitization protocols. Developing and implementing best practices requires drawing on guidance from the CDC and combining with expertise specific to facilities, equipment and applications.

// OUTFIT PERSONNEL TO UPHOLD CDC GUIDELINES

Equipping personnel with sanitization supplies and PPE, including nitrile gloves, hand sanitizer, disinfectant spray, face masks and hand towels helps enable them to adhere to guidelines for cleaning surfaces and limiting the airborne spread of viruses. The [CDC also provides guidelines](#) for cleaning procedures and sanitization products, with EPA-approved disinfectants against COVID-19 and recommended alternatives, including minimum alcohol content for sanitizing solutions. Customizable carrier kits can attach to lift trucks, so that operators and technicians have necessary supplies close at hand throughout their shift.





// TAKE AN INFORMED APPROACH TO LIFT TRUCK SANITIZATION

To put sanitization supplies to effective use, knowing and understanding the high-touch points on lift trucks is essential. The graphic below maps the high-touch points for a sit-down, four-wheel ICE forklift truck. Information on other lift truck product classes is available [here](#).





// MAKE SANITIZATION A CONSISTENT PRACTICE

Whether a technician visiting for a service call or an operator preparing for a normal shift, all personnel who interact with a lift truck should wipe down and sanitize the forklift truck, work area and any tools before starting and finishing work. Consistent application of sanitization procedures is key.

To help facilitate regular compliance, the checklist feature on telemetry solutions like Hyster® Tracker can be customized to add sanitization procedures along with the regular OSHA-mandated safety checks operators must complete as they start each shift.



Developed based on recommendations from the CDC, Hyster's pre-shift and end-of-workday lift truck sanitization checklist includes the following:

PRE-SHIFT

- Know and understand high-touch points of the truck
- Wipe down and sanitize the lift truck, work area and tools before starting work (High-touch points entering the truck, inside the operator compartment and other high-touch surfaces)

POST-SHIFT

- Return the lift truck to the parking area or charging station
- Wipe down and sanitize the equipment
- Provide a visual display that the lift truck has been wiped down, with a sign, sanitized band or other company approved indication
- Remove gloves by turning them inside out and roll one inside the other
- Dispose of PPE (gloves, face mask) and cleaning supplies (wipes, paper towels, shop towels) used while cleaning the truck in company approved disposal bins



// CONSOLIDATE VENDORS TO MANAGE RISK

With a virus capable of spreading quickly from person to person, introducing outside personnel can bring potential risk of exposure – even with strict policies in place for social distancing, PPE and sanitization. CDC guidelines recommend limiting the number of individuals gathering in a space at one time, tracking visitors and properly equipping them to follow site-specific safety protocols.

If anyone can enter your facility, everyone is at risk.

- An [article from Healthcare Business & Technology](#) emphasizing the importance of visitor management during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Of course, the world is getting back to business. The challenge becomes developing relationships with a limited number of trusted vendors for essential tasks like preventive maintenance, repairs and sourcing sanitization supplies. Consolidation allows operations to more efficiently scale by leveraging a partner already familiar with facility health and hygiene practices – limiting the redundancy of repeated health briefings and trainings, and reducing ongoing management and communication to help facilitate compliance.

STAY ON TOP OF MAINTENANCE

During the COVID-19 outbreak, many materials handling operations postponed critical maintenance and repairs in an effort to limit the risk of outside personnel introducing the virus. But this course of action comes with another set of risks, as equipment failure can stymie productivity and even threaten workplace safety.

Managing the risk of virus transmission and taking care of critical repairs and maintenance does not have to be a binary decision. Many leading service organizations have proactively developed their own measures against the virus and are equipped to accommodate site-specific requirements for hygiene and safety. For example, some Hyster dealers have separate equipment drop-off and service locations to limit contact between employees, along with their own strict procedures for hygiene and PPE and CDC-approved sanitization supplies for service technicians.

Talk to your maintenance and repair partner about their approach to health and safety, and how they can perform essential service while adhering to site-specific guidelines.






// BUILDING HABITS FOR THE NEW NORMAL

As the world moves forward, all industries must make the right adjustments to keep personnel healthy and safe. Consistency and collaboration are key, as in order for guidelines to combat the virus to be effective, they must be strictly followed at every opportunity, by all involved. By turning effective practices into consistent habits, the world can navigate new challenges and achieve even more.

To learn more, visit www.hyster.com.

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