



CREATING A CULTURE OF SAFETY

When any job or activity becomes second nature, familiarity often breeds inattentiveness—a sense of “autopilot” kicks in, and carelessness can result. Or, if a task or job can be completed more efficiently using some sort of shortcut, human nature will often dictate that action.

Unfortunately, both distraction and corner-cutting can lead to disaster for the individual and others. In the materials handling industry, specifically those facilities using forklifts and industrial trucks, safe practices involve multiple layers of application from truck and machinery operations, to employee and visitor conduct. And although every environment has unique functionality, consistent safety standards should be woven into every facet of business. Around the world, many national materials handling and industrial truck associations have established specific weeks or days to raise awareness of safe practices in this industry. But safety cannot be confined to a particular day or month.

For many organisations, a shift may be needed towards a culture where safety is everyone’s job, and should extend across operations and the supply chain.

// TOP-DOWN, BOTTOM-UP PROTECTION

When assessing the various levels of risk mitigation and elimination, comprehensive occupational safety involves a “hierarchy of controls,” which includes engineering, administrative controls, and personal protective equipment (PPE).

“Safe practices involve multiple layers of application”



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// ENGINEERING

The foundation of safety is established with years of engineering work and lab testing. Whether it's for a facility or an industrial truck, risk reduction must be inherently designed in.

When forklift operations are assessed, people typically look at efficiency, handling capacity, etc.,. However, engineering has developed a vastly different forklift over the past 50 years. It's not only more efficient but also more comfortable and markedly safer. Many of these engineered safety features are taken for granted, for example, overhead guards, and seat belts. Once not understood as necessary at all, overhead guards today are designed with strength and rigidity to protect operators from falling objects and also to allow for crucial visibility.

Advances in ergonomics have also positively impacted operator safety. Operator Assistance Systems (OAS) and engineered comfort allow for operators to sit in a truck for six, seven, or 10 hours without the pain and injury issues of the past. Ergonomically designed lumbar support, padding, reachable controls, and visibility have helped improve operator safety.

// ADMINISTRATIVE CONTROLS

Administrative controls are location-specific and multifaceted—and they are typically a result of local health and safety authority and government mandates. These regulations, though, are merely the minimal expectation of standards. However, the men and women who create the standards aren't on the job day in and day out. Rather, they go on-site only when there is a significant accident.

For administrative controls, including policies, procedures, and training materials, to be effective, they should reflect an understanding of an organisation's own climate. It is important to consider what is done specifically on the site, which types of trucks are in use, and how they are being used. Certainly, policies and training must follow regulations, but they must also go above and beyond to be site-specific, truck-specific, and operator-specific.

HIERARCHY OF CONTROLS

ENGINEERING—equipment and facility design engineered to mitigate and/or eliminate inherent risk

ADMINISTRATIVE CONTROLS—policies, procedures, and training within an organisation to protect staff, visitors, and equipment

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)—individual safety equipment (footwear, headwear, eyewear, etc.) used for protection and the last line of defence against injury or illness

Organisations should also seek out training resources developed by experts in the materials handling field, including manufacturers, dealers, and those who operate these trucks on a daily basis. Training is never a one-and-done activity; instead, it is a recurring cycle of training, evaluation, and follow-up. Moreover, when dangerous actions and/or behaviours are witnessed, operation leaders must take swift action and give immediate consequences, including hands-on mentoring, retraining, or probation.



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// PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

In the hierarchy of controls, the last line of defence is PPE, or Personal Protective Equipment. Wearing hard hats, gloves, and protective eyewear and using on-board safety features fall under this category. This safety aspect also includes proper care and maintenance of PPE. All of these components have been engineered for safety and perhaps mandated by administration, but the action to implement them is primarily at operator or individual level.

WALK THIS WAY: PEDESTRIAN SAFETY

Pedestrian safety is a vital aspect of overall forklift safety. Everyone working around trucks—employees, vendors, and visitors—must be trained to understand their risks and responsibilities. In a collision between a pedestrian and a lift truck, the truck will more likely win.

In addition to a safe facility layout, including the clear marking of pedestrian-only aisles, shared aisles, etc., Hyster encourages a pedestrian safety best practice called “Wait for the Wave.” It’s a deliberate action between operator and pedestrian to acknowledge, “I see you, and I value your safety. I will wait and wave you on.”

Every facility can practice pedestrian safety in this way, integrating formal training and risk-reducing practices into the culture.

// CHOOSING SAFETY

Regardless of the level of control, safety is ultimately an individual choice. Every person, every day, should make the correct decision every time. In fact, choice encircles the entire occupational safety environment and has been the primary focus of safety professionals and management for the past decade. For example, even though a flywheel guard has been engineered for operator safety, that operator must make the decision to keep that guard in place

and inspect it regularly. And, although a facility’s pedestrian training program could be ideal, a visitor may choose not to follow that rule. Moreover, every operator has a personal choice to don a hard hat or eye protection; some will make the correct choice, but others will not. The decision, comes down to the personal value one places on their safety—and the safety of those around them.

// GOING IN & GOING OUT THE SAME WAY

There are potentially millions of lift trucks and lift truck operators throughout EMEA. And when pedestrians throughout those environments are included, forklift safety requires protecting people on a very large scale.

Globally, there are yearly fatalities directly and indirectly related to forklifts. There are also numerous injuries related to forklift operations, which may be severe enough for the impacted persons to lose time at work. Although these numbers have reduced significantly over time they are still unacceptable. For forklift operations *zero injuries* should be the goal. Every single operator should leave work the same way he or she came in.

A culture of safety can be defined as a set of beliefs, attitudes, and actions consistently adopted by everyone in the organisation to make the right decisions that value safety. And when a wrong choice is made, the thinking has to become, “Even though I got away with a shortcut, I put myself and others at risk. I won’t do that again. For safety professionals, even impacting just one person each day to think this way, can make a difference.



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With industry and government primarily focusing on lagging performance indicators, it can be challenging to measure proactive performance or identify the right indicator(s) that demonstrates effective safety policy, process, and practice. But if individuals start to think and act differently about the way they're doing something, and they recognise the value in that change, that's when we start to see the culture shift.

“Every single operator should leave work the same way he or she came in.”

In theory, all accidents are preventable. Whether an accident occurs at home, at work or on the road, there is a true root cause. Once understood, that root cause can be addressed and impacted to prevent—or limit or reduce the severity of—that event. Taking action at the underlying causes and risk factors gets to the cultural issue of safety. A person may do

something risky because they've gotten away with it. They've been rewarded because there were no ill consequences—no one was hurt. So, until someone gets hurt or someone intervenes, those behaviours may continue. The industry as a whole must assimilate a level of understanding that places value on self and others.

Creating a culture of safety is about changing the decision-making of individuals and being an example for others. When one person chooses not to take a risky shortcut and someone else sees that decision, then they will, in turn, emulate making the right choice. A safety culture is passed on. The bottom-line goal for occupational safety professionals in the materials handling industry (and beyond) may be to develop a true culture of safety recognition and action, where environmental health and safety professionals are needed less and less.

Hyster forklifts are designed and built for optimal operator and pedestrian safety in numerous types of materials handling applications.

Visit www.hyster.com to learn more.