STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE

Forklift Operation SOP

Document no.	SOP-WHS-006
Revision	1.0
Owner	Warehouse Safety Manager
Effective date	September 15, 2026
Review cycle	Every 12 months

1. Purpose

To make sure only trained, authorized operators run forklifts, that equipment is inspected before use, and that loads are moved without injury to people or damage to product and racking.

2. Scope

Applies to all sit-down and stand-up counterbalance and reach forklifts used in the warehouse. Other powered equipment such as pallet jacks and order pickers are covered by separate equipment SOPs.

Definitions

Load capacity plate	The manufacturer's data plate on the forklift showing the maximum weight it can safely lift at a given load center and mast height.
Pre-shift inspection	The documented safety and mechanical check an operator performs before operating a forklift each shift.
Load center	The horizontal distance from the front of the forks to the center of gravity of the load, used to determine safe lifting capacity.
Pedestrian aisle	A marked walkway in the warehouse reserved for foot traffic and off-limits to forklift travel except at designated crossings.

3. Responsibilities

Forklift Operator	Inspects the forklift before use, operates it safely within capacity limits, and reports defects immediately.
Warehouse Safety Manager	Authorizes trained operators, reviews inspection logs, and investigates incidents.
Maintenance Technician	Repairs reported defects and performs scheduled preventive maintenance on the fleet.
Warehouse Supervisor	Enforces traffic rules on the floor and removes a defective forklift from service.

RACI matrix

Activity	Forklift Operator	Warehouse Safety Manager	Maintenance Technician	Warehouse Supervisor
Authorize operator to drive	I	R/A	-	C
Perform pre-shift inspection	R	A	-	-
Remove defective unit from	R	A	C	R

Activity	Forklift Operator	Warehouse Safety Manager	Maintenance Technician	Warehouse Supervisor
service				
Repair reported defect	I	A	R	I
Investigate an incident	C	R/A	C	C

R = Responsible, A = Accountable, C = Consulted, I = Informed

4. Materials and PPE

Materials, tools and systems

- Pre-shift inspection checklist
- Forklift operator authorization card or badge
- Out-of-service tag
- Maintenance and defect log
- Load capacity plate reference chart
- Battery charging or fueling station log

Personal protective equipment

- Seat belt (worn at all times while operating)
- Steel-toe safety shoes
- High-visibility vest
- Hard hat where overhead work is in progress

5. Procedure

Step	Task	Owner	Done
5.1	**Confirm operator authorization** Before operating any forklift, confirm your operator authorization is current for that specific class of equipment, and do not operate a forklift you have not been trained and authorized on.	Forklift Operator	☐
5.2	**Perform the pre-shift inspection** Complete the pre-shift checklist covering tires, forks, mast, hydraulics, lights, horn, seat belt, brakes and fluid levels before starting the engine or motor. **Checkpoint:** Every item on the pre-shift checklist is checked and initialed before the forklift is used.	Forklift Operator	☐
5.3	**Tag out a defective unit** If any item fails inspection, attach an out-of-service tag, report it to the supervisor immediately, and do not operate the forklift until maintenance clears the tag. **Warning:** Never operate a forklift with a known safety defect such as leaking hydraulic fluid, a cracked fork or a non-functioning horn.	Forklift Operator	☐
5.4	**Check the load against capacity** Confirm the load weight and load center are within the limits on the capacity plate before lifting, and never exceed rated capacity even for a short move.	Forklift Operator	☐

Step	Task	Owner	Done
5.5	**Travel with the load lowered** Travel with forks lowered to a few inches off the floor and the mast tilted back, and never drive with a raised load except when placing or removing it from a rack. **Warning:** Traveling with a raised load reduces stability and blocks the operator's view, a leading cause of tip-overs.	Forklift Operator	☐
5.6	**Observe pedestrian right of way** Sound the horn at intersections and blind corners, yield to pedestrians in marked aisles, and make eye contact with nearby workers before proceeding.	Forklift Operator	☐
5.7	**Maintain safe travel speed** Keep speed appropriate to aisle width, floor condition and visibility, and slow down further when carrying an oversized or unstable load.	Forklift Operator	☐
5.8	**Place and retrieve loads at height** Square the forklift to the rack bay, raise or lower the load slowly and level, and confirm the load is fully seated and stable before backing away. **Checkpoint:** The load is fully seated on the rack beam and centered before the operator releases and backs away.	Forklift Operator	☐
5.9	**Refuel or recharge safely** Refuel propane units or connect electric units to charge only in the designated station, following the site's procedure for handling fuel or battery equipment.	Forklift Operator	☐
5.10	**Report an incident or near miss** Report any collision, tip-over, product damage or near miss to the supervisor immediately, regardless of severity, and complete an incident report before the end of the shift.	Forklift Operator	☐
5.11	**Shut down at end of shift** Park the forklift in its designated area, lower the forks fully to the floor, set the parking brake, turn off the power, and remove the key or connect the charger.	Forklift Operator	☐
5.12	**Review inspection logs** Review pre-shift inspection logs and any tagged defects weekly, tracking repeat issues by unit and confirming maintenance closed out reported items.	Warehouse Safety Manager	☐

6. Quality checks

- Every operator has a current authorization on file for the equipment class they run.
- Pre-shift inspection checklists are completed and initialed for every unit, every shift.
- Out-of-service tags are not removed until maintenance confirms the repair.
- Incident and near-miss reports are filed the same day they occur.

7. Records

- Pre-shift inspection checklists
- Out-of-service tags and maintenance clearance records
- Operator authorization records
- Incident and near-miss reports

8. KPIs

- Percentage of shifts with a completed pre-shift inspection
- Number of forklift incidents or near misses per month
- Average time from defect tag to repair completion
- Percentage of operators with current authorization

9. Common mistakes

- Skipping the pre-shift inspection when the forklift was used earlier the same day.
- Traveling with the load raised instead of lowered.
- Exceeding rated capacity for a load that only needs to move a short distance.
- Removing an out-of-service tag before maintenance clears the repair.

10. Revision history

Revision	Date	Description	Reviewed by
1.0	September 15, 2026	Initial release	Ilia Pirozhenko

Approval

Prepared by	Approved by	Date

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