New / Young Worker Safety: Fatality Report



INCIDENT

The incident happened at an agricultural cooperative (co-op). The co-op's retail store was connected to the co-op's tire shop and a warehouse. Also, on the grounds was an equipment storage shed, a fertilizer shed, and an outdoor storage area where 200-pound molasses animal licks were stored. A large flat concrete parking lot extended in front of the store entrance and around one side of the warehouse where a loading dock and ramp were located.

At the time of the incident a customer was helping the victim as he loaded a molasses lick into another customer's trailer using a forklift. Approximately 5 minutes later, the customer heard a loud crashing sound. He ran over to the area where the victim had been operating the forklift and saw the forklift tipped over on its side. The victim was lying face down and pinned under the cage of the forklift and with one leg extended and the other leg doubled up under him.

The customer ran to get help. While he and a co-worker ran back to assist the victim, another coworker ran into the company's store to call 911. The customer and co-worker were unable to lift the forklift manually and told another co-worker to get a front-end loader. As co-workers lifted the forklift off the victim using the front-end loader, the customer pulled the victim clear. The victim was conscious but having difficulty breathing.

The police and fire department responded to the scene at 2:00 p.m., the ambulance was dispatched at 2:08 pm. and responded at 2:09 p.m. EMS personnel examined the victim and inserted an endo-tracheal tube at 2:18 p.m. followed by a needle chest decompression immediately after, to help the victim breathe.

A medical helicopter was dispatched to transport the victim to a trauma center, but while the ambulance was in route to meet the helicopter, the victim's condition deteriorated, and the victim was transported instead to a local hospital. The victim arrived at the hospital at 2:32 p.m. and was pronounced dead at 3:16 p.m. in the hospital's emergency room.

NEED TO KNOW

A 17-year-old warehouse worker was fatally injured in forklift incident when he was crushed to death. He was employed under a work-based learning program. He had been working for 3 months in this program at the time of his death.

BUSINESS / REGULATIONS

The entrance/exit of the warehouse was narrow, measuring 70 inches in width. A post and an abandoned grain feed dispersal bin located inside the entrance left just enough room for the forklift to pass through.

- Old scrape marks on the forklift and on the post and grain bin inside the warehouse were likely indicators of a tight fit.
- The local manager said that forklift operators had to speed up to make it up the ramp and then had to slow down at the entrance to fit through the narrow passage after passing through the warehouse door.
- The ramp's surface was patched and rough where the ramp joined the flat, level parking lot.
- The co-op was being relocated so the rough pavement in the transitional area where the level parking lot met the ramp, and the confined areas in the warehouse had not been changed because of the planned move.
- It is worth noting these issues were known and identified as problematic.
- A well-developed safety and training program were lacking.

STATISTICS

This young warehouse worker had only been working for 3 months in an apprentice program. Yet, he was apparently qualified to drive and manipulate one of the most dangerous vehicles in the warehouse scenery – the forklift.

Forklifts accidents cause many deaths in the warehouse workplace across North America for inexperienced and experienced workers alike.

Workers between the ages of 15 and 24 are the largest percentage of part-time, temporary, contract, casual and seasonal workforces. They're a tremendous asset to many organizations, tackling jobs with energy and enthusiasm. Unfortunately, though, these workers also face unique and substantial risks for work-related illnesses and injuries. In 2008, more than 139,000 American youth between the ages of 14 and 24 were injured at work; 436 died. Every year in Canada, more than 48,000 young workers are injured seriously enough to require time off from work. Also, in 2007, 38 young Canadian workers died from work-related injuries.

PREVENTION

"an ounce of prevention will yield a pound of cure."

The following procedures, policies and precautions will help prevent similar accidents:

To help prevent similar occurrences:

- Conduct periodic inspections and frequently remind equipment operators to use seat belts provided and never try to jump from an overturning sit-down type forklift.
- Check travel routes used by forklifts are free of obstacles and other unsafe conditions.
- Establish work policies that comply with child labor laws prohibiting youths less than 18 years of age from performing hazardous work, including operating power-driven hoisting equipment such as forklifts. All employees should be aware of this policy.
- Develop, implement, and enforce a comprehensive written safety program for all workers which includes training in hazard recognition and the avoidance of unsafe conditions.

- A written training plan should require training for all forklift operators that includes the equipment manufacturers’ recommendations for safe equipment operation.
- Identify and label equipment not to be operated by workers under 18 and only provide keys to trained and authorized operators.