

Warehouse Fall from Pallet Elevated by Forklift

U.S. Department of Labor

Occupational Safety and Health Administration

www.osha.gov (800) 321-OSHA (6742)

INCIDENT SUMMARY

Incident type:Fall to lower level
Weather conditions/Time of day:Indoors/approx. 6:30 AM
Type of operation:Bulk wholesale warehousing
Size of work crew:22
Worksite inspection conducted:No
Competent safety monitoring on site:No
Safety and health program in effect:No
Training and education for workers:None
Occupation of deceased worker:Laborer
Age/Sex of deceased worker:33/M
Time on job:4 years
Time at task:2-3 hours
Employment classification (FT/PT/Temporary):Full time
Language spoken:Spanish
Union/Non-Union:Non-Union



Photo courtesy of OSHA

Figure 1: Example of a worker unsafely pulling inventory on a raised pallet.

BRIEF INCIDENT DESCRIPTION

A warehouse worker was fatally injured after falling seven feet from a wooden pallet elevated by a forklift. The warehouse inventory was stored on steel storage racks with the highest shelves about eight feet above the concrete floor. It was common practice for warehouse workers to place one foot or both feet on a pallet and move inventory on the top shelf (see Figure 1) while a coworker lifted them to the top shelf using the forklift, even though the equipment was not designed for this purpose. At the time of the incident, the worker slipped on the pallet while moving inventory and fell. The worker was taken to the hospital where he died from his injuries a few days later.

Likely Causes

Controls were not in place to prevent workers from improperly using equipment and falling to the ground. Specifically, the employer did not:

- Provide workers with equipment for safely reaching inventory stored on elevated shelves.
- Follow manufacturer instructions and prohibit employees from using pallets on forklifts to access upper shelves.
- Provide training and certification to forklift operators on how to safely use and operate forklifts, including not using them to lift workers without an approved personnel lifting platform.

INCIDENT PREVENTION

Accessing warehouse storage shelves by lifting workers on pallets presents serious fall hazards. The employer must implement safe procedures and provide the proper equipment and training to prevent injuries and fatalities. Pallets are not designed for sitting or standing, nor should they be used for lifting workers with a forklift. Instead, employers should use manufacturer-approved personnel lifting platforms.

You Have a Voice in the Workplace

The *Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970* affords workers the right to a safe workplace (see **OSHA's Worker Rights page**, www.osha.gov/workers). Workers also have the right to file a complaint with OSHA if they believe that there are either violations of OSHA standards or serious workplace hazards.

How OSHA Can Help

For questions or to get information or advice, to report an emergency, fatality, hospitalization, amputation or loss of an eye, or to file a confidential complaint, contact your nearest OSHA office, visit www.osha.gov or call our toll-free number at 1-800-321-OSHA (6742), TTY 1-877-889-5627. It's confidential.

OSHA standards and regulations:
www.osha.gov/law-regs.html

OSHA publications:
www.osha.gov/publications

OSHA-approved state plans:
www.osha.gov/dcsp/osp

Free On-site Consultation services:
www.osha.gov/consultation

Training resources:
www.osha.gov/dte

Help for Employers:
www.osha.gov/employers



To prevent a similar incident from occurring:

- Do not allow workers to ride on or occupy pallets lifted by forklifts.
- Provide workers with the proper tools and equipment for each task, including accessing working surfaces (e.g., elevated storage shelves in a warehouse).
- Equipment designed for lifting workers in a warehouse include:
 - Manufactured personnel platforms, designed for lifting workers on a forklift, which incorporate fall protection (i.e., guardrail systems). This option requires prior written approval from the forklift manufacturer (29 CFR 1910.178(a)(4)).
 - High-lift order pickers, a powered industrial truck class equipped with personal fall arrest equipment that are designed to lift the operator alongside the forks. (See Figure 2.)
- Provide training on forklifts to workers who operate and work near them. Training should include formal instruction and hands-on training at a level and in a language workers understand. Employers must ensure that workers do not operate a forklift with another worker on the pallet, and that they follow manufacturers' instructions (29 CFR 1910.178(l)(1)).
- Provide workers with fall protection and ensure their proper use in accordance with the [Walking-Working Surfaces rule](#), and personal fall protection system standards.

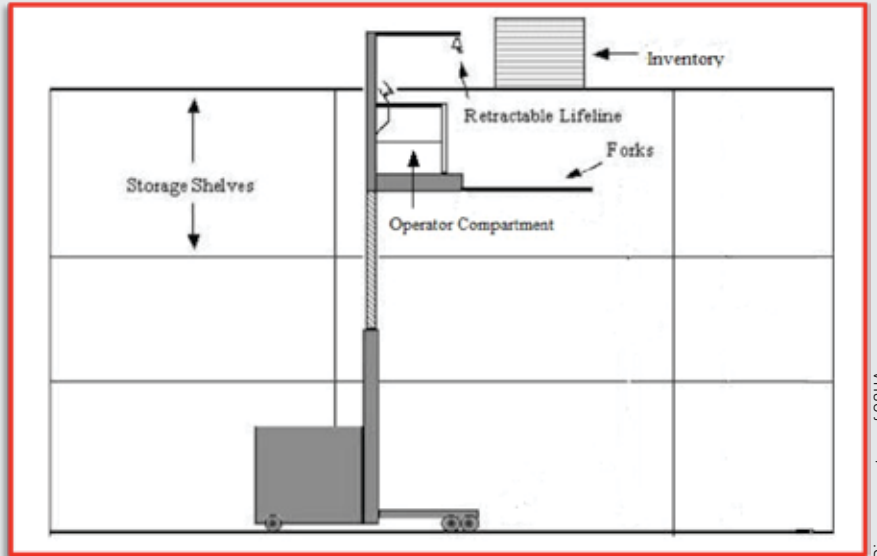


Figure 2: High-lift order picker

Diagram courtesy of OSHA

Note: The described case was selected as being representative of improper work practices which likely contributed to a fatality from an incident. The incident prevention recommendations do not necessarily reflect the outcome of any legal aspects of this case. OSHA encourages your company or organization to duplicate and share this information.

This Fatal Facts is not an OSHA standard or regulation and it creates no new legal obligations. The recommendations contained herein are advisory in nature and are intended to assist employers in providing safe and healthful workplaces. The Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 (OSH Act) requires employers to comply with safety and health standards promulgated by OSHA or by an OSHA-approved state plan. The requirements of OSHA-approved state plans can be reviewed by selecting the state's website at: www.osha.gov/dcsp/osp. The OSH Act's General Duty Clause, Section 5(a)(1), requires employers to provide employees with a workplace free from recognized hazards likely to cause death or serious physical harm.

For assistance, contact us. We can help. It's confidential.



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