

OSHA issues new standard on Powered Industrial Trucks that now covers construction.

**By Steven D. High, CSP,ARM
High Safety Consulting Services, Ltd.**

The new powered industrial truck standard, issued December 1, 1999, applies to construction and general industry. It will appear in section 29 CFR 1926.602 (d) of the construction standards as a new entry. Previously, there was no specific standard that applied to these trucks in a construction application.

A powered industrial truck is defined by The American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME) as a mobile, power-propelled truck used to carry, push, pull, lift, stack, or tier materials. Powered industrial trucks are also commonly known as forklifts, pallet trucks, rider trucks, forktrucks, or lifttrucks.

The revised standard, which becomes effective on March 1, 1999, must be fully implemented by December 1, 1999. Compliance with the new regulations are estimated to prevent 11 workplace deaths and 9,422 injuries per year.

A quick summary of the changes that will impact the construction industry are as follows:

Training will be required for all operators of this equipment. Obviously, this is prudent regardless of the existence of a regulation. Clearly, untrained operators can create serious damage and injuries on a site.

The training must consist of conceptual formal style instruction and an evaluation of the operator's skills following operational practice training by the trainee. Trainees are limited to operation of a powered industrial truck only if they are supervised by a competent person and the safety of the operator and others in the area is assured.

A very specific list of training topics must be covered during operator training and these are specified in the new standard. These will most likely be located at 29 CFR 1926(d)(3)(i-iii) in the construction standard.

Every three years the operator must be re-evaluated. This re-evaluation must include the name of the person observed, the date of the last training, the date of the evaluation, and the identity of the competent person performing the evaluation.

If the evaluation is found to be unsatisfactory, additional training is mandated. Also, refresher training is required when:

1. The operator is observed operating unsafely.
2. The operator is involved in an accident or near-miss incident.
3. The operator is assigned a different truck to operate.
4. A condition of the workplace changes that could affect the safe operation.

This new regulation will require that construction companies keep more diligent attention to training and recordkeeping to assure compliance.

I can't help but add a few comments of my own as I consider the impacts and application of this regulation to construction. Generally, I believe the regulation is positive and that it does have the potential to reduce injuries, if it is properly implemented.

I am concerned with OSHA's concept of using training as a cure-all to safety problems. If an operator is observed operating unsafely, is it because we have failed to properly train and educate the worker? Sometimes, yes. But, there are a wide range of other potential causes of unsafe performance.

If an operator fails to operate safely, the solution may be enforcement of work rules and disciplinary procedures. It may mean that we need to re-evaluate our workloads to match safe operating capabilities. We may need to select a different type of equipment for the job. Perhaps substance abuse is involved, which dictates another solution.

Until we can understand the root cause of the unsafe behavior, we really cannot dictate the cure. Unfortunately, OSHA's cure-all solution is, "re-train 'em". This *could* be a waste of time and valuable training dollars.

The other concern that I have is item number four in the list above, requiring retraining when site conditions change that could affect safe operation. A strict interpretation of this could infer re-training at every site. Clearly, this is not practical. Yet, if OSHA visits a site as the result of a serious injury or fatality involving a forklift, I question whether this element might not be pulled into play as the basis for a citation, regardless of the nature of the training provided previously.

To prepare for this new regulation, I would suggest the following sequence:

1. Obtain a copy of the regulation (1910.178(l)) from the OSHA office in Harrisburg, or locate the standard on OSHA's Web Site www.osha.gov.
2. Make a list of all of the equipment that falls into the definition of a powered industrial truck in which training will be required.
3. Determine which employees need to be trained to perform their job tasks.

4. Identify a training resource. This may be someone in your company, an equipment supplier, or a consulting company to assist you in the implementation.
5. Develop and/or review the training agenda to be sure that all of the required items mentioned in the standard will be covered. Consider the exposures your company has and past incidents involving these pieces of equipment to be sure that these areas are covered in the training.
6. Determine how you will document the training and the operator evaluation for each piece of equipment.
7. Conduct the training.
8. Evaluate the training and determine what changes may need to be made.
9. Determine who will be responsible for assuring that the 3-year re-evaluation is completed, as required by the standard, and who will maintain the company training records.

It may be helpful to develop an internal company policy to address the authorization and training of operators. This will establish the goals of the program, the responsibilities, and will assist you in maintaining compliance with the new standard. Yes, I know, one more thing to put on your "TO DO" list!