

Forklift training forges ahead

FORKLIFTS USED TO HAVE THE sort of bad reputation that is today associated with ATVs.

Five or six operators would be killed each year, along with a number of bystanders or workmates who were unlucky enough to be struck by one of the vehicles, or to fall from the forks.

In the mid-1990s things took a significant turn for the better when the *Approved Code of Practice for Training Operators and Instructors of Powers Industrial Lift Trucks (Forklifts)* was developed.

The Department of Labour was the publisher, but it was an industry code, developed by the drivers and trainers themselves in an awareness-raising exercise that saw the annual death toll fall to zero months before publication.

Between 1994 and November 1997 there were no fatal forklift accidents – but the honeymoon was not to last. In the next 12 months three people died – two of them operators and the other in a cage on the tines.

NO ROOM FOR COMPLACENCY Since then the toll has never returned to pre-code levels, but forklift-related accidents remain a regular occurrence. In the last three years there have been six fatalities and three injury accidents resulting in prosecution (see box story).

Maurice Flood, the Department of Labour's forklift expert who oversaw development of the code, says the document sets the minimum training standards for the industry but, even 10 years after its introduction, a greater awareness of safe forklift use is still needed.

"I got a phone call yesterday. The boss had told his guys to use an old forklift that was in a poor state of repair – bald tyres

and so on. They were concerned about its safety, but it also turned out that none of them had been trained. They had just been told to go and use it without any opportunity to receive instruction."

Flood concedes that this was probably an extreme case, but says people need reminding that the law requires forklift operators to be both *trained* and *authorised*.

"Not only do they have to hold the appropriate certification, but also the employer has to authorise – in writing – that particular operator to use that particular forklift," he says.

SIZE DOES MATTER

While there may be little difference in the operating requirements for forklifts powered by diesel, petrol, LPG or electricity, different sizes and types of vehicle require specific training programmes.

"If you, as a car driver, normally use a little Japanese automatic and are suddenly put into a big older model car with manual transmission and no power steering, you're going to find it difficult," Flood says. "It's the same with forklifts, when you get into the bigger container-capable ones.

"Specialised equipment requires specialised training."

Under the code of practice, a trained operator's certification will specify the type of training he or she has received (basic, refresher, specialist or advanced), the type of vehicle it applies to (reach truck, pallet truck, counterbalanced front loading forklift, etc), and the relevant motive power, rated capacity and nature of attachments.

"It's not blanket coverage," Flood says. "If you want to operate a different size or type you will need extra training."

It is now ten years since the code setting out training requirements for forklift operators was introduced. JACKIE BROWN-HAYSOM looks at the shape of the industry today.

Refresher training vital Operator certification must also be renewed every three years – a move made mandatory at the industry's request following a code review in 2000 – and Flood believes the follow-up course is often more important than the initial one.

"It reinforces what they have been taught. Sometimes, in the refresher course, when the trainers talk about stability triangles or centre of gravity, someone will say 'Oh yeah, I remember...' and the trainers know that person didn't really understand it the first time, but they've got hold of it this time."

Employers, Flood says, often want to recruit operators who have F endorsements on their driver's licenses, but in many workplaces these are unnecessary.

"There are misconceptions about the F endorsement. It means you can legally drive a

forklift on a public road, but does not, of itself, mean you are trained to operate a forklift for lifting and loading.

"If I went to a workplace and an operator pulled out his F endorsement, my response would be 'That's good – you can drive it on the road. But what I want to know is can you actually use it for what it's designed to do?'"

ENDORSEMENT VS CERTIFICATION

The endorsement, he says, is only needed when an operator is required to travel between work areas on the road, unload trucks at the roadside, or work in a yard or carpark that has public access – situations that don't exist in most work situations.

"Some employers are very pro the F endorsement, but a forklift is a forklift, regardless of where it is used. The en-

Further reading:

- The *Approved Code of Practice for Training Operators and Instructors of Powers Industrial Lift Trucks (Forklifts)* can be found on the Department of Labour website at www.osh.dol.govt.nz/order/catalogue/527.shtml
It includes questions and pictorial quizzes that can be used to raise safety awareness in the workplace.
- A full list of registered forklift trainers is also on the DoL site at www.osh.dol.govt.nz/services/registered-forklift.shtml
- The same site also has a series of Accident Alerts relating to forklift incidents at www.osh.dol.govt.nz/order/catalogue/522.shtml
- Most of the incidents recorded date from the late 1990 to 2001, but the most recent report was added in September this year.
- A forklift safety guide produced by Australian workplace safety enforcement agency, WorkCover ACT, is available at www.workcover.act.gov.au/pdfs/Forklift_Safety_Booklet.pdf
- A forklift safety quiz, based on a training video produced by US safety trainer MANCOMM, is available on the website of *Occupational Hazards* magazine at www.occupationalhazards.com/articles/13818

There are misconceptions about the F endorsement.

- Maurice Flood.

dorsement has more to do with the rules of the road and with who gives way to whom, than with safe forklift operation.

"There are a lot of operators who don't have driver's licenses, but they are trained and approved to operate forklifts, and can be damn good operators. The lack of an F endorsement shouldn't discriminate against them."

Regardless of the type of training you need, and the size and sort of forklift involved, Flood says good trainers shouldn't be hard to find.

"Most responsible trainers offer both operator certification and F endorsement, and can train for different types of vehicle.

"There is a list of registered trainers on the Department of Labour website (see below). It isn't compulsory to be registered, but reputable trainers will want to meet the standard."

TRAINER ASSESSMENT

To retain registration, trainers are currently assessed by the

department every three years. An industry working party currently overseeing a review of the code has recommended, however, that from next year industry training organisation *Competenz* assume responsibility for registering training providers.

The assessment process involves a check of the training material and syllabus to ensure it complies with the code's requirements, and ensuring the trainers themselves have both a current forklift license and a suitable qualification as a provider of training.


The last stage of the process is a competency review, to dem-

onstrate that the trainers have a thorough understanding of both the theoretical and practical side of forklift operation.


"The registration is for individuals, not companies, so everyone on the list has met our standards," Flood says. "There are some 55 registered trainers around the country at any time.

"There's quite a good geographical spread, and numbers remain reasonably stable over time, although some forget and let their registrations lapse."

- The code review is nearing completion and will soon go through formal consultation, with any changes expected to be implemented in 2006. ■



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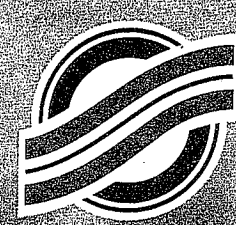
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