

## Health & Safety – Forklift Operators

### Introduction

A forklift truck (also called a lift truck, a fork truck, or a **forklift**) is a powered industrial truck used to lift and move materials short distances. Forklifts have become an indispensable piece of equipment in manufacturing and warehousing operations.

Forklift-related accidents cause a significant proportion of workplace fatalities all over the world. International studies show that many of these accidents could have been prevented by better operator training. No one starts out with the innate knowledge, skills, and abilities to safely operate a forklift.

Organised training demonstrates that employers have taken steps to ensure their “duty of care” in the unfortunate event of an accident. The lesson to be learned is, *operating a forklift without training is dangerous and can even be fatal to the operator or other employees working in the area...*

### Operator Licensing

The New Zealand Approved Code of Practice (ACOP) relating to forklifts requires that employers must ensure their employees are either sufficiently experienced to do their work safely, or are supervised by an experienced person. In addition, employees must be adequately trained in the safe use of equipment in the place of work, including protective clothing and equipment. The Health and Safety in Employment Act 2002 Section 20 requires all operators of forklifts to be trained in their safe operation. The possession of a driver's licence is not sufficient evidence that the person is qualified to operate a forklift.

Operators must have:

- Completed a “full” forklift operator’s course and hold a current certificate of the training received (often referred to as an “OSH Certificate”). The ACOP recommends that retraining be undertaken every three years, on the completion of which a new operator certificate is issued.
- Authorisation from their employer to operate forklifts in their employment workplace. This is usually in the form of a formal letter of authorisation to the individual employee, and can only be issued by the employer after the required training has been satisfactorily completed.

If the forklift is to be operated in an area where the public have access to (i.e., an area defined as a “road”) the forklift operator must **also hold** a current New Zealand Driver Licence with a forklift (F) endorsement. A “road” is defined in the Land Transport Act 1998 as:

- A street and
- A motorway and
- A beach and
- A place to which the public have access, whether as a right or not and
- All bridges, culverts, ferries and fords forming part of a road or street or motorway; and
- All sites at which vehicles may be weighed for the purposes of the Act or any other enactment

The simple test is that if a member of the public can access a forklift operating area, even if not authorised to do so, the forklift operator must have an F endorsement on their Driver Licence.

These requirements also apply persons other than employees that may be required to operate a forklift in the employer’s workplace, such as drivers of vehicles delivering goods and loading and unloading their vehicle.