



Lifting our game

Court judgements highlight common issues

A number of employers have recently been fined over forklift injuries and, in some cases, deaths. Four cases are of particular interest and highlight the sorts of hazards that arise from the use of this equipment in the workplace.

The first case concerned an incident in August 2007 in which a 56 year old delivery driver tripped over the tines of a forklift which was about to exit the curtained doorway of a cold-room. The driver suffered head injuries which are now preventing him working.

The judgement in the South Australian Industrial Court elaborated that the employer...

"...was alleged to have permitted forklifts, employees and non-employees to use the common doorway, and in circumstances where that doorway had impaired visibility for those exiting or entering the building."

....and that....

"A system of separating pedestrians and forklifts in and around the doorway was identified as the appropriate hazard control measure that should have been implemented to eliminate or reduce the risk of collision and injury."

Does the mixing of forklifts and pedestrians occur at your workplace? Are there any special hazards that this presents to you in your job, either as a

driver or someone working around forklifts?

The second incident, also in South Australia concerned a man, aged 38 at the time, who had been with the firm just two weeks in his job as a labourer. The press release stated:

"He and two colleagues had been instructed to clean a work area: a job, which involved lifting several large items by forklift."

In the process of this task, a drum that was part of an unsecured load raised aloft by the forklift, fell about two metres onto the man as he moved a second pallet beneath."

He suffered a head wound, which required stitches and a finger injury that required surgery. In a Victim Impact Statement, the court heard that the worker had been unable to resume his work as a labourer as a result of the finger injury."

This case highlights the obvious dangers of moving unsecured loads and working in close proximity while this is being done. As an impartial observer, and in hindsight, there are a number of things that stand out about the situation.

Basic risk assessment by both the employer and the employees who were carrying out the task is one, and other issues that should have been considered easily come to mind.



Clearly not a recommended use for forklifts. Photo of "second place getter" in WorkSafe Victoria's "Absolute Shocker and Bodgey Scaffold of the Year" Award 2004.

The final two incidents occurred in Victoria and Queensland respectively. Both involved rollovers and, in common with the last case, 'new' workers.

A WorkSafe Victoria media release (edited to highlight the main points) summarises the first of these.....

"A Kilsyth company was convicted and fined \$60,000 on Monday after a forklift driven by a 22-year-old man tipped over, crushing his foot which was later amputated."

The worker was not licensed to drive a forklift – nor was he wearing a seatbelt when the forklift tipped in December 2008."

End the trend by reporting incidents



Lately we have noticed a trend that Maxima placements are not reporting workplace incidents to their consultants or to the OHS & W team at Maxima.

Please remember that even though you may be hosted at various work locations, Maxima is your employer. It is essential that your Consultant is aware of any workplace incident or injury so that you receive prompt, appropriate assistance.

Winter weather heightens safety concerns

Winter brings with it wet, soggy and cold working conditions for those who have to work outside, not to mention safety hazards including slippery surfaces and tools, lightening strikes and electrical hazards.

So, while we wait for Spring, let's remember some common safe practices for working in wet weather:

- Try planning ahead so that you have tasks that can be completed indoor; if possible.
- Plan ahead for site drainage and or pumps to ensure the site dries out quickly after wet weather.
- To minimise slipping hazards, check all treads (steps, ladders, trucks etc.) to ensure they are in good condition.
- Make sure all electrical equipment is kept out of the water.
- If wet weather is accompanied by wind, be sure loose items or

structures are tied down or braced.
 → Be aware of your surroundings, watch foot placement and keep an eye out for falling objects.

And talking about falling objects...

Between 2005 and 2008 there were 1070 compensable injuries and 8 deaths resulting from injuries which arose from working at heights in Victoria. Figures from other States are no better.

As a result, the various States are now focusing their attention on the safe working practises for work at heights and one strong message is...**you don't have to fall from a great height to be killed or end up in a wheel chair with brain or spinal damage.**

Make sure that your work practices include assessing the site, ensuring that the ground below where you are working is free from debris and that you use the correct fall control equipment.

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"The worker began driving forklifts less than a month after beginning work (and) after a few months, he was driving a forklift every second day – despite not holding a license.

The incident occurred when the worker tried to make a right turn on an uneven and inclined gravel area. As the machine tipped, the operator went to jump out the left side but the forklift landed on his feet and trapped him.

When investigating the incident, WorkSafe found (the employer) did not have systems to ensure forklift drivers held licences, were trained, or wore seatbelts. In addition, drivers had not been trained on the Linde forklifts, which had a different foot pedal set-up to other forklifts used at that workplace."

So contributing to this incident were the combination of licensing, training, seat belts, uneven surface – issues that occur in most forklift incidents in Australian workplaces - together with the not so unusual addition to this list of 'new worker'.

It was also noted in the press release that since the accident, the employer had made changes including...

"implementing a register of employees who hold a forklift licence (and) a system which disables forklifts' engines until the operator has fastened the seatbelt."

Finally, in Queensland, emergency services sources reported...

"Firefighters and paramedics responded to a business...after a man became trapped under a forklift.

The 18-year-old suffered from crush injuries to his head, neck and chest and was declared deceased at the scene."

Media reports suggested that the man had been working at the abattoir for only two months and was not licensed to operate a forklift.

Clearly, this seems like an all too familiar and avoidable tragedy.

Team Queensland a sure bet

There have been some recent changes at our Queensland office so we thought we would bring you up-to-date.

The team currently comprises:

Apprenticeships and Traineeships

- Michael Franzmann (second right)
- Debbie Stefancic (second left)
- Ruth Bishop (third left)
- Cammy Tzilves (far left)

Tempskill

- Mike Blunden (far right)

Training Services

- Jamie Speeding (third right)

Linda Bills and Sandy Vue have recently left, with Linda moving to Tasmania (take your long johns, Linda)

and Sandy continuing her traineeship with one of Maxima's Queensland clients.

We wish both all the best and welcome our new starters.

Cammy joined the team bringing with her a wealth of experience in Administration. She enjoys playing poker and computer games; so other staff tend to look uncomfortable if she suggests having a card night.

The other relatively new starter is Mike Blunden.

Mike comes to Maxima Tempskill with experience in the labour hire industry and is an avid motor racing fan, who enjoys nothing better than to take his "bike" out for a run in the hills.

