

Forklifts are used for a range of workplace activities from transferring loads around a facility to stacking, lifting and picking goods.

Each year, both deaths and serious injuries are associated with forklift use in Australia. In Victoria, in 2022 more than 140 workers were injured in forklift accidents.¹ This makes the identification, assessment and control of hazards associated with forklift use essential in the workplace.

Managing the hazards

When conducting a risk assessment on forklifts, consider if they can be eliminated by other load moving equipment. If elimination is not possible, can the design and layout of the workplace be modified to remove interactions between pedestrians and vehicles.

In addition the risk assessment should consider the risks posed, and mitigation strategies which may include to:

- establish and maintain a site-specific Traffic Management Plan
- ensure training, licensing and competency is suitable and current for all drivers
- ensure vehicles are well maintained and used in accordance with manufacturer's guidelines
- conduct pre-start safety checks prior to use
- establish safe work procedures and training
- ensure drivers understand visibility and load stability requirements
- ensure gas cylinders are adequately secured on forklifts and stored and handled appropriately as per the relevant Australian Standards.
- establish clear and well defined pedestrian and forklift exclusion zones
- establish safe zones for vehicle drivers to wait whilst forklift loading and unloading activities are occurring
- utilise accident and near miss incident data insights to identify and eliminate problem areas

- eliminate any areas with poor visibility and highlight intersections
- utilise visible and audible warning devices
- use physical measures such as safety barriers, fences and designated pedestrian zones where required
- ensure forklifts are fitted with speed limiting devices
- establish clear and legible signage and a culture of wearing high visibility clothing in forklift areas
- assess and reduce the risks posed by the environment in which the vehicle is operating such as overhead power lines, manufacturing equipment and sloping or slippery surfaces
- utilise engineering controls like interlocked gates, proximity alarms and telemetry
- ensure adequate lighting and ventilation.

All forms of mitigation used to minimise forklift and pedestrian incidents should be reviewed regularly to ensure they remain effective and suitable. Audits should be conducted to ensure safe work practices are being adhered to. All visitors and third parties to the site through the induction process should be made aware of the Traffic Management Plan and specific risks and requirements when in forklift areas. To minimise injuries from forklifts effective identification, assessment and control of hazards associated with forklift use are essential in conjunction with constant review and monitoring.

Reference:

1. Worksafe Victoria, More than 140 workers injured in forklift incidents last year, viewed 19 May 2026 <https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/news/2023-01/more-140-workers-injured-forklift-incidents-last-year?utm_source=miragenews&utm_medium=miragenews&utm_campaign=news>
2. Worksafe Victoria, Work practices to control risks from forklifts, viewed 19 May 2026 <<https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/work-practices-control-risks-forklifts>>

For more information 

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