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Forklifts are like any other heavy-duty machinery, they occasionally require little TLC. And if you're in charge of general forklift maintenance, that responsibility falls on you. Whether you're responsible for daily checks or managing long-term maintenance plans, staying informed about protocols, OSHA requirements, and cost-saving strategies is crucial. This article will guide you through the maintenance protocols to keep your forklifts in top shape, ensuring they remain efficient, productive, and safe. Additionally, we will share money-saving tips along the way. Specifically, we'll cover: Let's dive in! Forklift Maintenance Benefits Performing regular maintenance yields crucial benefits for your forklift operations. Let's go through the biggest ones. Longer Service Life The more regularly a lift is serviced, the longer it will last and the more productive it becomes. This leads to a longer economic life for the forklift and a better return on investment (ROI). Better Productivity Regular maintenance means more uptime because the more the lift truck can run, the more your operation can produce. Plus, you can minimize disruptions to the production schedule by proactively planning maintenance around it. Money Savings With regular forklift maintenance, you're more likely to identify minor problems. This includes common issues like weeping fittings, low fluid levels, and debris-filled components. If you can identify and repair these minor problems early, you can save yourself from a significant (and more expensive) repair down the road. Safety Priority Every company using forklifts has a legal and ethical responsibility to maintain them in safe operating conditions. You want to ensure your team goes home safely at the end of every shift. That is why regular forklift maintenance is essential. It helps identify general safety issues and repair them before they lead to a forklift operator or pedestrian being injured or worse, being killed. Higher Resale Value If you intend to trade in your forklift, a well-maintained vehicle will recoup a large portion of your initial investment in the secondary market. A well-maintained forklift commands a higher price than one in poor condition. Additionally, if you are leasing your tow motor, it is crucial to ensure regular maintenance. Otherwise, you will face a substantial bill when the lease ends. OSHA Forklift Maintenance Requirements Not only do the benefits listed above support the need for a proper maintenance schedule, but OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) also mandates that forklifts be in optimal condition before they are put into service [1]. 1. The Importance of Preventive Maintenance While OSHA mandates inspections and repairs, it is equally crucial to have a preventive maintenance (PM) program in place. A well-structured PM program helps prevent costly breakdowns, increases forklift lifespan, and reduces workplace accidents. Preventive maintenance should follow the manufacturer's recommendations for servicing intervals, which may depend on usage hours and work environment conditions. Regularly scheduled PM reduces downtime and ensures compliance with OSHA standards. 2. Common Forklift Maintenance Issues That Lead to OSHA Violations Highlighting common maintenance oversights can help reinforce the importance of compliance. Examples include: Worn or damaged tires - Can cause stability issues and increase tipping risks. Faulty brakes - A frequent OSHA violation that can lead to accidents [2]. Leaking fluids - Hydraulic or fuel leaks create hazardous conditions. Malfunctioning safety features - Horns, lights, seatbelts, and alarms must always be in working condition. Dead or damaged batteries (electric forklifts) - Can lead to unexpected failures and unsafe operations. 3. Employer vs. Operator Responsibilities Clarify who is responsible for different aspects of forklift maintenance: Employers are responsible for providing well-maintained equipment, scheduling inspections, and ensuring compliance with OSHA's standards (National Safety Council - Forklift Safety). Operators must perform daily pre-shift inspections and report any issues immediately [3]. 4. Consequences of Non-Compliance Beyond OSHA Fines Beyond fines, non-compliance can lead to: Increased injury risk - Poorly maintained forklifts contribute to workplace accidents. Higher insurance costs - Companies with frequent OSHA violations may see increased premiums. Lost productivity - A breakdown can halt operations, affecting efficiency. Reputational damage - Repeat violations can harm a company's reputation and impact business relationships. Real-World OSHA Fines for Forklift Violations Companies that fail to follow OSHA's forklift maintenance regulations have faced significant penalties: A meat company in Nebraska was fined \$22,000 by OSHA in 2012 for forklift violations that should have been caught and corrected during a pre-trip inspection. [4] A transportation company in Illinois was fined \$108,020 by OSHA in 2014 for several safety violations, including failure to remove a forklift from operation that needed repairs. [5] A national farm supply company in Ohio was fined \$258,672 by OSHA in 2018 for failure to fix faulty brakes despite being reported by their employees. [6] 5. OSHA's Requirements for Forklift Maintenance Recordkeeping OSHA does not explicitly require businesses to keep written records of daily inspections, but it's highly recommended to do so. Keeping records helps prove compliance in case of an audit. It creates a paper trail for maintenance and repairs, ensuring forklifts remain in safe operating condition. 6. How to Train Employees on OSHA Forklift Inspection & Maintenance Requirements Proper training is critical to ensure employees conduct inspections and report defects correctly. Consider including: Regular safety meetings that cover forklift maintenance requirements [7]. Hands-on training for operators to identify and report safety hazards. A checklist that employees must complete before operating a forklift. We have made this simple by creating a free, downloadable pre-shift weekly inspection sheet that you can modify as needed. You will find it in the section below. Daily Pre-Trip Inspection Items We have taken the liberty to assemble the most common items included in a daily pre-trip inspection. And we have noted which items are for internal combustion (IC) and electric (E) trucks only. Download Your Free Weekly Forklift Inspection Checklist Print and reuse this free daily/weekly forklift inspection checklist templates often as required. Choose whichever format you would prefer below and click to download. Download PDF Version Download Excel Version Download Visual Guide That said, different forklifts can require different daily maintenance inspection items. So, consult the operator manual for the particular forklift you are operating. How Often Should Forklifts Be Serviced? Now that you know what items to check before operating, let us move on to the service actions required to maintain a forklift. For starters, the two most common maintenance intervals for forklifts are: Every six weeks (or 250 hours). Every year or 2,000 hours Both of these intervals have a different set of action items that must be inspected and serviced. While these intervals are pretty standard, there are factors to consider when determining maintenance frequency. By keeping these in mind as you plan your service intervals, you will help to keep your heavy-duty machine in the best (and safest) operating condition. Factors That Affect Maintenance Frequency Manufacturer recommendations Always adhere to the manufacturer's recommended service intervals, which may differ depending on the manufacturer and the specific truck model. However, this information is found in the operator's manual.

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