

Food for thought

opinion



Gerry Simpson of Barloworld Handling takes a look at Health and Safety issues that affect the day to day handling and storage of food and beverage.

According to the HSE, this year around 270 people in food and drinks factories across Britain will be struck by fork lift trucks and other vehicles, frequently resulting in serious injuries. Other employees may fall from vehicles or be trapped whilst many other health and safety issues will go unreported. These are alarming statistics, so let's have a quick look at how risks can be reduced.

Firstly, health and safety policies must be supported at the very top and matched to the actual operational environment, so the starting point has to be a regular and detailed risk assessment, particularly when operations grow or change. Help and advice from an experienced forklift company is recommended.

Where possible, businesses should look to segregate areas where pedestrians and vehicles are working. Careful planning, such as separate pedestrian walkways supported by clear signage, will help stop the two from meeting. Hi-vis jackets should be worn and vehicle alarms used. To enforce this, staff training and continued supervision is essential to ensure that everyone understands the dangers and follows procedure. Companies must consider the extra risk of wandering office staff or visitors and the turnover of temporary workers.

Typically a wide range of warehouse

and counterbalance trucks are used within the food and drinks industry and it is a legal obligation for employers to train drivers on the specific equipment they use. Failure to comply can lead to heavy fines, custodial sentences and may invalidate liability insurance. An RTITB or ITSSAR approved driver training course is advisable.

Manual handling risks should also be assessed with full training and appropriate handling equipment provided as this is a major area of personal injury.

Food hygiene is obviously highly important and keeping the environment clean is a major factor when selecting forklifts. Battery power is usually preferred in confined warehouses or production areas with no exhaust emissions to contaminate produce. Non-marking tyre compounds can also be specified reducing particle contamination.

Check product quality and beneficial design details, for example, Hyster's O-ring pipe fittings eliminate hydraulic leaks, auto-decelerating Duramatch transmissions virtually eliminate wheel spin, HSM stabilises trucks and extra height can be applied to cabs for improved visibility with tall loads. Cab comfort and ergonomics help reduce noise, vibration and driver fatigue resulting in a safer driver and trucks can be programmed with maximum speeds and automatic speed reduction

on cornering, reducing chances of tipping accidents or collisions. Many truck features enhance safety operations, so ask your dealer for advice but don't forget that maintaining equipment correctly will help avoid product failures.

Some materials are flammable either in production or as finished product. DSEAR risk assessments identify areas that are hazardous requiring ATEX compliant (i.e Pyroban) explosion proof equipment. Conversely, cold store operations may require cabs specifically designed to keep the operator warm.

With the best will in the world,

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procedures can slip under daily operations, one in particular that the HSE focuses on is falls from height. Under no circumstances should a person take short cuts and be lifted on the forks or pallet. Make sure steps or platforms are provided.

Health and safety in the food and drinks industry is an enormous subject, but if health and safety risks are identified and well managed, handling and storage accidents can be avoided. www.barloworld-handling.co.uk

