

Never tyre of safety



Gerry Simpson of Barloworld Handling highlights the safety role that tyres and flooring play in a materials handling operation.

Tyres and flooring are two key elements of fork lift truck safety that are often, quite literally, overlooked, even though the entire load and truck stability rides on the wheels. But fork lift truck managers can enhance safety levels, simply by appropriately selecting and maintaining the forklift tyres and floor surfaces.

Firstly, it is important to identify the type of tyres suited to the application. Tyres are engineered to match specific tasks, so an assessment of the fleet, the site and the application is important before making a decision.

Forklift tyres are normally either pneumatic (air-filled) or solid (resilient or press on band). Pneumatic tyres can be selected for indoor or outdoor applications but particularly help absorb bumps and vibrations found on

on smooth surfaces.

Tyres are manufactured from numerous different compounds with varying tread patterns and it is sometimes difficult to make a choice. Barloworld offers a free site survey to define the most suitable size, compound and tread for an application to maximise efficiency, traction and braking. For example, certain tread compounds can maximise traction in cold store environments or be non-marking for use in operations that require extremely high levels of hygiene, such as food or chemical manufacturing operations. Anti-static tyre compounds are specified for use in potentially explosive atmospheres to prevent static ignition and other compounds are specified to reduce excessive heat build up which can make tyres slippery.

Choosing good quality tyres over budgets is recommended in most applications since they last longer, offer lower rolling resistance, reducing fuel consumption and deliver improved performance and safety to the operation. Barloworld works with one of Europe's leading tyre manufacturers, Continental, to ensure availability of the best quality tyre alternatives for any application.

But tyre safety does not stop at the right selection; they must also be regularly checked and maintained. Worn tyres lose their ability to dissipate water and heat, leading to a loss of traction, braking and steering capability, so frequent inspections are vital. It is important to repair or replace

damaged tyres and wheels early and also regularly check the inflation pressure of pneumatics.

Ideally, drivers should include tyres and wheels in their daily checks. However, only trained operatives should attempt to change tyres. Barloworld provides a tyre inspection service, where a trained technician will visit periodically to check the condition of tyres and recommend replacements when required.

The condition of the floor's surface also plays a major role in operational safety. Spillages, rubbish such as shrink wrap in the warehouse aisles, leaves in the yard or floor damage could all cause an accident involving work vehicles, so it is very important to maintain good standards of housekeeping and maintenance.

This is especially true in warehouse operations that utilise VNA (Very Narrow Aisle) equipment, where operators work at heights of up to 17m. The dynamics of a VNA machine are very sensitive, so it is vital for operator safety that the floor surface is completely even and well maintained, without any bumps or dents. Warehouse floors may have to be resurfaced, since an uneven floor could lead to truck instability and a risk of goods falling from height.

Operations managers must not overlook the effects of tyres and flooring on safety. From initial tyre selection to the maintenance and housekeeping of the tyres and floors, getting these elements right will reduce the chance of an accident. ●

“Worn tyres lose their ability to dissipate water and heat, leading to a loss of traction, braking and steering capability”

rough terrain. This provides increased comfort to the driver as well as reducing the risk of damage to the forklift and load through fierce shock loading. It is however important to regularly check the quality of the tyre's wall, casing and resistance to puncture as sudden deflation can lead to accidents.

Solid tyres are better suited to indoor applications or where there is a high risk of tyre damage and puncture. Their construction offers reduced maintenance and low rolling efficiency

