

# Safety under pressure

opinion



**Gerry Simpson** of Barloworld Handling takes a look at Health and Safety issues that affect companies during periods of peak demand.

It's that time of year when operations managers are starting to deal with the increased activity that the build-up to Christmas brings. To deal with seasonal peaks, often temporary staff are recruited and additional materials handling equipment hired, but how can companies ensure they do not compromise safety?

Good planning, supervision and thorough risk assessments are key elements for maintaining day-to-day safety, but it is important to make sure these plans consider peak periods where increased activity increases the risk. This applies to measures such as clearly marked routes for on-site traffic flow and separated areas for pedestrians and vehicles, to reduce the risk of collisions and accidents.

It should already be clear to employers that they are both morally and legally obliged to ensure all staff are adequately trained, regardless of job role or contract length. However, extra caution must be taken at peak times when the workforce is expanded and there is greater pressure on staff to work quickly.

Of course this applies to all fork lift truck drivers who must hold a valid operator certificate, which determines what class of truck, including the type of attachment, they are qualified to operate. At peak times, new or temporary staff must be carefully managed and should not be asked to

operate equipment they haven't been trained to use. Barloworld provides driver training courses that help companies maintain safety during peak periods by educating drivers of the best practice.

But it is not just fork lift truck drivers who must be trained, as the risk of manual handling injury is often underestimated, particularly at busy times. A short manual handling course can help reduce the risks and ensure companies meet HSE guidelines.

Another factor which is growing in today's current UK workplace, is that not all workers speak English. For those companies that employ foreign workers, training materials should be made available in various languages. Barloworld, for example, has produced a Polish language *Lift truck operator safety guide* to help companies who employ Polish workers.

It is also true that safety standards can slip at Christmas and other peak times due to added time pressures caused by the increased workflow. To help companies keep a firm control of operator standards during busy times, Barloworld provides a range of safety awareness courses for managers and supervisors, giving them a basic understanding of safe lift truck operation and risks.

In addition to temporary staff, many companies utilise additional forklifts. Whether bought and kept onsite for peak times or hired on a short term

basis, all fork lift trucks must be properly maintained and have a valid certificate of Thorough Examination in order to be legally compliant. Without one, wear and weather damage to occasional use trucks could go unnoticed, jeopardising safety. It is also important to check that your chosen fork lift supplier has a proper maintenance regime in place for the trucks.

When hiring fork lift trucks and equipment you should make sure that the hire company has quality, up to date equipment suited to the application. Over the past two years, Barloworld has invested £10million in new Hyster forklifts for its short term hire fleet to deliver the safety and productivity

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required for today's demanding logistics operations, and offers a wide variety of reliable equipment at short notice.

Whatever the time of year, safety is a fundamental aspect of industrial operations. However, on-site standards can slip, with procedures or supervision becoming lax during peak periods, so it is important to remember the significance of safety at all times. If the business and the additional resources are prepared in advance, there is no reason why safety should ever be compromised. ●