

26/00 Forklift driver dies in forklift accident

Incident

This Significant Incident Summary replaces SIS 5/1998 issued on 16 July 1998 and draws heavily on Coroner McGuire SM's Record of Investigation into the accident issued on 16 June 1999.

A forklift driver was fatally injured at a Balcatta Warehouse on 1 August 1997 when the forklift he was driving reversed over the edge of a loading dock, dropping a distance of 1.15 metres landing on its rear, before rolling onto its right side. It is not clear whether the injuries sustained by the deceased were caused by his head being struck by a portion of the forklift or by a gas bottle from the forklift which had broken free.

At the time, the company had three forklifts on-site at the warehouse, all with similar foot control pedals and compatible operations. One of the forklifts had broken down and was considered to be nearing the end of its productive life. Therefore replacement forklifts were being trialled and assessed so that a decision could be made as to which forklift should be purchased. The forklift in question was one of those being trialled.

The forklift was manufactured in Germany and while the foot pedal operation differed to what was considered normal convention in Australia, it represented the normal foot pedal operation in Europe.

The deceased had just finished an instruction session on the operation of the forklift when the accident occurred. He had begun to unload goods from a truck and reversed the forklift away from the truck in an arc, carrying three wooden pallets. An eyewitness said he had expected the deceased to move forward, but instead the forklift appeared to accelerate backwards over the edge of the loading dock.

A Chartered Professional Engineer, who had carried out an assessment of the forklift after the accident, reported at the Coroner's Inquest inter alia:

- i. That the forklift which he examined was in good working order and functioned correctly as per specifications;
- ii. The design of the forklift complied with Australian Standard 2359;
- iii. The forklift was fitted with a falling object protection structure as required by AS2359; and
- iv. The forklift was fitted with a lap type seatbelt which, when properly used by an operator, would constrain most of his body within the confines of the falling object protection structure, thereby preventing serious injury.

Following the accident, the following actions were taken at the Balcatta Warehouse:



1. Introduction of a truck movement system to better control vehicular movements within the warehouse;
2. Removal of excessive material located within the hard standing area;
3. Provision of yellow arrows indicating traffic flow directions and "no loading" areas marked on the pavement; and
4. Provision of physical barriers at changes to surface levels.

Factors

Recommendations

1. In the Record of Investigation of Death into this matter, the Coroner recommended that:

"all forklift drivers be required to use the seat belt at all times whilst operating a forklift".

All users of forklifts are urged to comply with this recommendation.

2. Regulation 4.55 of the *Occupational Safety and Health Regulations 1996* provides that if there is an industrial lift truck (i.e. forklift) at a workplace, then a person who is an employer, main contractor or self employed person at the workplace must ensure that the industrial lift truck is operated in accordance with AS 2359.2. All persons who are subject to this regulation are urged to obtain a copy of this standard and ensure that the requirements are met.
3. Owners, suppliers and users of forklifts have other legislative obligations. These obligations are set out in sections 19(1), 20(1), 20(2)(d), and 23 of the *Occupational Safety and Health Act 1984* and regulations 3.5, 4.33 and 4.44 of the *Occupational Safety and Health Regulations 1996*. Persons involved with the use of forklifts are urged to ensure compliance with these provisions.

Further Information

Further information can be obtained from the WorkSafe internet site www.worksafe.wa.gov.au, or by contacting customer service on 1300 307 877 or email: safety@docep.wa.gov.au.

A414496

Date: July 2000

