

10 Safety Rules to Include in Your Warehouse Traffic Control Plan



Forklift-pedestrian collisions are a common cause of serious and even fatal injuries at warehouses, construction projects, and other sites where powered mobile equipment (PME) scuttles about. Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) regulations require employers to identify traffic safety hazards and implement a plan to control them. A traffic safety control program goes beyond painting lines on the floor and warning workers to “watch out for forklifts.” One of the most crucial elements is a set of traffic control rules explaining what forklift operators and pedestrians must do to stay out of each other’s way. While specifics may vary by jurisdiction, setting, and equipment, there are 10 core rules any traffic control plan should include.

Rule 1. Pedestrians Must Use Designated Walkways

The starting point is to separate pedestrian traffic from forklift and other PME traffic. Require workers to use designated pedestrian routes that are clearly marked and kept free of pallets, materials, equipment, and other obstructions.

Model Language: “Employees and visitors must use designated pedestrian walkways whenever traveling through the warehouse.

Pedestrians must not walk through forklift aisles, loading areas, or other powered-equipment operating zones except at designated crossings or when authorized work requires entry into the area. *[Describe any limited exceptions in which workers are allowed to stray from designated walkways while specifying that convenience isn't one of them.]*"

Rule 2. Forklifts Must Use Designated Travel Routes

Like pedestrians, forklift operators should be required to follow established travel routes. In designating these rights, account for aisle width, intersections, loading areas, storage locations, and areas of high pedestrian activity.

Model Language: "Powered mobile equipment must remain on designated travel routes except when necessary to perform an assigned task. Operators must not use designated pedestrian walkways as equipment travel routes or bypass established traffic controls for convenience."

Rule 3. Pedestrians Must Use Controlled Crossings

While completely banning pedestrians from crossing forklift routes may be unrealistic, you can and must control where and how such crossings occur. Designated crossings should be conspicuous, located where operators have adequate visibility, and positioned to minimize unnecessary interaction with moving equipment.

Model Language: "Pedestrians may cross powered-equipment travel routes only at designated crossings, except where an authorized work procedure requires otherwise. Before entering a crossing, pedestrians must stop, check for approaching equipment and proceed only when the crossing can be made

safely.”

Rule 4. Operators Must Follow Safety Procedures When Approaching Intersections

Establish specific safety procedures for forklifts approaching an intersection, particularly where another aisle, doorway, or storage area limits visibility. “Use caution” isn’t enough. Depending on layout, the intersection approach safety procedure might involve slowing, stopping, sounding the horn, checking both directions, and proceeding only when the route is clear.

Model Language: “Operators approaching an intersection, doorway or other location where pedestrians or equipment may enter the travel path must reduce speed and assess the area before proceeding. The operator must sound the horn or use the designated warning device where appropriate and must not proceed until the travel path is clear.”

Rule 5. Operators Must Follow Safety Procedures When Approaching Blind Corners

Blind corners are predictable collision points. In addition to engineering and administrative controls like convex mirrors, improved lighting, barriers, warning lights, audible warnings, or changes to storage arrangements, require operators to follow a specific safety procedure when approaching blind corners.

Model Language: “Operators approaching a blind corner or other restricted-visibility location must slow to a safe speed and follow the designated visibility-control procedure. Where the

operator cannot adequately determine that the travel path is clear, the operator must stop and use the required warning, mirror, signaler, or other control before proceeding.”

Rule 6. Workers Must Follow Safety Procedures When Entering Forklift Operating Areas

If total exclusion isn’t reasonably practicable, establish safety procedures for order pickers, maintenance personnel, inventory staff, supervisors, and visitors to follow when entering areas in which forklifts operate. The traffic procedure should address when equipment must stop, when communication with the operator is required, and when an area must be temporarily isolated.

Model Language: “Workers entering a powered-equipment operating area outside a designated pedestrian route must follow the applicable access procedure. Where required by the procedure, the worker must obtain acknowledgment from the equipment operator and/or ensure that equipment movement has stopped before entering the area.”

Rule 7. Operators Must Obey Posted Speed Limits

Controlling forklift speed is vital but methods will depend on site conditions, equipment, operations performed, and other factors. Thus, while a single maximum speed may work for some facilities, others may need different limits for aisles, intersections, ramps, loading areas, or pedestrian-heavy zones. Also require operators to reduce speed when conditions warrant, regardless of the posted maximum.

Model Language: “Powered mobile equipment must not exceed

posted warehouse speed limits. Operators must reduce speed below the posted limit whenever conditions warrant, including when approaching pedestrians, intersections, doorways, congested areas, ramps, wet or slippery floors, or locations with restricted visibility.”

Rule 8. Unauthorized Shortcuts Are Strictly Prohibited

A traffic control plan won’t work if workers don’t follow it. Temptations to evade the rules and take shortcuts may arise where the designated route is inconvenient, takes longer, or otherwise fails to accommodate the way work is actually performed. Supervisors must therefore pay attention to where workers are walking—not just whether signs and floor markings exist.

Model Language: “Employees and visitors must not cross barriers, enter restricted equipment areas, or take shortcuts through powered-equipment operating zones. Supervisors must address violations promptly and investigate recurring violations to determine whether additional controls or changes to the traffic plan are necessary.”

Rule 9. Supplemental Traffic Controls Must Be Used at Loading Docks & Confined Areas

There should be supplemental safety procedures for controlling traffic in loading docks and other areas in which forklifts, pedestrians, delivery drivers, trailers, and other vehicles operate in a confined area. For example, it may be necessary to restrict pedestrian access while loading or unloading is underway and specify where workers may safely stand while trailers are being positioned or serviced.

Model Language: “Pedestrian access to loading and unloading areas must be controlled while powered mobile equipment or vehicles are operating. Drivers, pedestrians, and equipment operators must use designated routes and comply with dock-control procedures. No person may enter a trailer, dock lane, or equipment operating area when doing so would expose the person to uncontrolled vehicle or equipment movement.”

Rule 10. Traffic Control Plan Must Undergo Regular Review

Traffic control plans must be constantly updated to ensure they reflect current hazards. Accordingly, you must review your plan in response to changes like the introduction of new racking, addition of forklifts, shipping volume increases, site construction, or changes in pedestrian traffic patterns. Review should also take place after incidents, near misses, complaints, infractions, and other indications that the current plan isn't working.

Model Language: “The traffic control plan must be reviewed following a significant change to the warehouse layout, traffic patterns, equipment, operations, or pedestrian access, and whenever an incident, near miss or observed unsafe condition indicates that existing controls may be inadequate. Changes to the plan must be communicated to affected workers before the revised traffic arrangement is placed into service.”

Takeaway

Is your current traffic control plan up to snuff? A good way to find out is to stand at the busiest intersection of your facility and observe operations for 10 or 15 minutes. Questions to ask:

- Where do pedestrians actually walk?

- Where do forklifts actually travel?
- Do workers cross wherever it is convenient?
- Do operators slow down at blind corners?
- Are pallets or temporary inventory blocking sightlines?

If the behaviour you observe differs substantially from the plan you've written, you'll need to take immediate action to fix the disconnect before one of your forklifts plows into one of your workers.