

February 2005

Forklift maintenance: What does OSHA mean by "in need of repair"?

OSHA recently issued a Letter of Interpretation to clarify the Powered Industrial Truck (1910.178) standard's use of the terms "in need of repair," "defective," and "unsafe."

Issue: The language of 29 CFR 1910.178(p)(1) requires that "[i]f at any time a powered industrial truck is found to be in need of repair, defective, or in any way unsafe, the truck shall be taken out of service until it has been restored to safe operating condition."

Question 1: Can OSHA provide specific definitions of "in need of repair" and "defective?"

Reply: Neither 29 CFR 1910.178, its source standard ANSI B56.1-1969, nor the current ASME B56.1-2000 defines any of the words for which you request clarification. However, in determining whether a truck is " . . . in need of repair, defective, or in any way unsafe," OSHA would take a variety of factors into consideration. These factors include, but are not limited to, the condition of the truck itself, the manufacturer's limitations on the truck, and other safety issues, such as those considerations found in consensus standards like ANSI B56.1. While specific definitions of these words are not available, in this context OSHA will consider the totality of the circumstances surrounding a powered industrial truck in determining whether it is "in need of repair" or "defective."

Question 2: What does OSHA mean when the word "unsafe" is used in the standard, and can OSHA provide examples of an unsafe condition on a powered industrial truck?

Reply: "Unsafe," as used in 1910.178(p)(1), carries the general connotation of presenting a harm or risk. As stated above, OSHA will consider a number of factors in determining whether a powered industrial truck is unsafe. For example, all gauges must be functioning properly for the truck to be considered safe. Should a gauge not be functioning properly, that truck will usually be considered defective and in need of repair, thereby making the truck unsafe. Broken welds, missing bolts, or damage to the overhead guard would indicate that a truck is unsafe. Tires that are missing large pieces of rubber would present a risk to the truck operator, thereby making the truck unsafe. Such conditions must be repaired and corrected before the truck is placed back in service. It must be noted, however, that these are simply examples of unsafe conditions on a powered industrial truck; this list is not inclusive and there are certainly other conditions that would render a truck unsafe.

Important:

This information is offered by the Gases and Welding Distributors Association and your local distributor as general guidance only and may not explain all relevant safety precautions or hazards.