

## How to Prevent Pallet Jacks from Causing Injury

A pallet jack may not be the most hazardous piece of equipment in your workplace. But its simple appearance can be dangerously deceiving. Manual pallet jacks have been the culprit behind crushed toes, scraped knuckles and pulled backs. Improperly stored and these devices also pose tripping hazards. If your facility uses pallet jacks, share these safety tips with your workers.



### **Wear proper protective gear**

Workers who work with pallet jacks need to wear appropriate personal protective equipment that may include:

- Safety-toed footwear to prevent foot injuries caused by being run over by the wheels, being hit by materials falling from the jack or stubbing a toe on the jack;
- Gloves to reduce the risk of cuts, bruises and blisters; and
- Safety eye wear to prevent injuries from material strapping or hazardous chemicals being moved.

### **Follow these safe handling guidelines**

Here are some tips for workers to keep in mind when using a pallet jack;

- Check the floor for ruts, bumps and other imperfections.
- Never place your feet under a pallet jack.
- Never exceed a pallet jack's load capacity.
- When going down an incline, push, don't pull.
- Stick to correct traffic lanes, and be alert to avoid collisions around corners.
- Be aware of pinch point hazards to your hands.
- Use proper lifting techniques when loading and unloading.
- Pallet jacks are for loads not passengers.
- Never push any faster that you are able to control it or stop it.
- Spotters should accompany the operator in areas where the view is obstructed
- Use both hands when 'pumping' the handle to raise the forks.
- When unattended, lower the forks all the way down and leave the handle in the upright position.

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### **Maintain the Pallet Jacks**

After a while, the solid rubber wheels of pallet jacks can develop wear, resulting in unstable loads and poor handling. In turn, workers can experience stress to the hands and arms because of difficulty steering and stopping the device.

Periodic maintenance of pallet jacks will enable workers to operate the devices with the minimum amount of hand, arm and finger force.

### **Maintain the pallets too**

Keeping your pallets in good condition may sound trivial, but it's not. Using a damaged or defective pallet can have serious consequences. For example, it can cause a load to shift and fall, resulting in injury. It's important to inspect pallets before using them.

### **Store them properly**

When not in use, store pallet jacks where they will not create tripping hazards. And make sure that the devices do not block exits or emergency equipment, such as fire extinguishers.

### **To Push or Pull?**

Manual Pallet Jacks - A person can push almost 4 times what they can pull and if a worker feels it's necessary to use both arms to pull then the worker is probably overexerting and at risk for a lower back injury or a shoulder injury while pulling the pallet jack. Has anyone ever seen a person pull a car that is stuck in the snow to get it going? We have an inherent logic about pushing because we know that we are stronger when we push with our legs, which is the same principal as lifting with our legs rather than our back, but too many workers pull pallet jacks because they don't think about the body mechanics involved. Using both arms to pull a pallet jack behind yourself is also a recipe for being run into by the pallet if you have to stop suddenly. By pushing they will find they have more control, being able to steer/maneuver away from obstacles, and you can stop a lot quicker. It is impossible to always push a pallet jack but pulling should only be allowed to position the pallet for moving, not for actually moving the pallet around. Ask your employees to spend the day pushing instead of pulling and see if they notice the difference at the end of the day. With a little practice, they may be surprised!

Electric Pallet Jacks – The same rules apply as with manual jacks. The only difference is that these machines operate when you are in the pulling position. The jack is doing all the work the operator is running the controls located in the handle.