

Safe Operation of a Counterbalance Forklift (Class 1, 4, 5, 7)

Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)

1. Purpose

To prevent death, serious injury, and property damage when operating a counterbalance forklift (electric, LPG, or diesel) up to 15 tonne capacity.

2. Scope

Applies to ALL counterbalance forklifts in the workplace.

3. Legal Requirements (New Zealand)

Only persons who hold ONE of the following may operate a forklift unsupervised:

- NZQA Unit Standard 10851 (Operate a powered industrial lift truck – forklift) + current OSH/FSH certificate, OR
- Current F endorsement on driver licence + company-specific endorsement
- Overseas forklift certificate converted via WorkSafe-recognised assessor

4. Mandatory Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- Hard hat (AS/NZS 1801)
- Hi-vis vest or jacket (Class D/N)
- Steel-cap safety boots
- Seat belt (must be worn at all times when fitted)

5. Pre-Operation Checks

- Visual walk-around: tyres, lights, horn, mirrors, mast, forks, hydraulic leaks
- Fluid levels (fuel, oil, coolant, hydraulic, battery water)
- Seat belt and seat secure
- Brakes, steering, and hydraulic controls functional
- Capacity plate legible and load < rated capacity
- Overhead guard and load back-rest in place

6. Safe Operating Procedure

Starting & Travelling

- Adjust seat and mirrors, fasten seat belt
- Sound horn before moving
- Travel at ≤8 km/h in warehouses, ≤20 km/h outdoors (walking pace in congested areas)

- Always face direction of travel – reverse if load blocks view
- Keep arms, legs, and head inside the cab
- No persons on forks or pallets
- Maintain 3 m separation from pedestrians where possible

Lifting & Stacking

- Never exceed the rated capacity on the data plate at the load centre shown
- Tilt mast back slightly when carrying load
- Lower load fully before travelling any distance
- Stack only on firm, level ground – never on ramps
- When placing load in racking: stop fully, raise to height, move forward slowly, lower into position, tilt forward slightly, reverse out
- Never travel with forks raised more than 300 mm

7. Refuelling & Recharging

- LPG: engine off, no naked flames, outdoors or well-ventilated area
- Diesel: engine off, no smoking
- Battery: PPE (face shield, apron, gloves), no smoking, ventilation, spill kit available

8. Shut-Down & Parking

- Lower forks flat to ground
- Apply park brake, neutral, key off
- Park in designated area, away from traffic routes
- Remove key and return to secure location

9. Absolutely Prohibited Actions (Zero Tolerance)

- Carrying passengers
- Using mobile phone while operating
- Travelling with load raised
- Parking on a slope without wheel chocks
- Using forks as a work platform without approved cage and permit
- Speeding or stunt driving
- Operating under the influence of alcohol or drugs

10. Emergency Procedures

- Tip-over: stay in cab, brace feet, hold wheel, lean away from fall
- Pedestrian incident: stop immediately, sound horn, report to supervisor
- Fire: lower load, shut off engine/fuel, use extinguisher, call 111
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11. Training & Refresher

- Full training every 3 years OR after incident/near miss
- Company familiarisation on each forklift type before solo operation

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Position: Director

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