

Many times over the years, our company has been approached by employers wanting to “recertify” their employees. When we informed them that the training we provide is the same training we provide to a new client, some ask if there is a shorter, cheaper version of the initial safety training, just to “recertify”.

Employers sometime fail to realize that just having their employees trained does not end their responsibility. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration states that the end user, (the employer) will be held responsible for the safe use of powered industrial trucks. Just having a certificate on the wall or documentation in a file is not enough.

Forklift safety training is without a doubt one of the most inexpensive approaches a company can take to reduce their accidents, cut the cost of damage to products, lower their maintenance costs, and reduce their exposure to liability.

The initial training cost approximately one hundred dollars per person and only has to be repeated every thirty six months. If done properly, the safety instructor knows that this training is site and equipment specific, and so the employer saves money by not having to send their employees to a specific location, the trainer will come to them.

Assuming that we will start with a group of ten participants, this means the cost per person is about nine cents per day. If we add in the average pay of twelve dollars per hour per operator, again with ten people, this works out to thirteen and a half cents per person per day over the three year period. Of course this does not take into account the productivity loss that the employer sees while the training is going on.

When asked to “recertify” employees, it is our responsibility to inform the employer of the best approach in getting the job done.

Our position, taken seriously has several key issues we must always focus on:

1. **The safety of the operator.** This is without a doubt our primarily goal in the training and should be, to others unfortunately, their goal seems to be just getting a certificate so that they can show some training was done. Make no mistake, we are dealing in lives here, if we fail in our jobs, employees can be injured or killed, and families can be devastated.
2. **The safety of those around the operator.** We tend to focus on the person on the forklift and fail to recognize that there are many others that can be affected by the operator’s actions, or inaction.
3. **Compliance to the standards set by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.** These standards are in place because they work. Often we forget in the pursuit of the capitalistic dream that it is achieved by the work, sweat, and worry of those who we employ. We become aggravated with the duties of compliance, and fail to realize that a safer environment is a more profitable environment.
4. **Criminal liability.** Employers have in the past been charged with criminal offenses for knowingly placing their employee in danger.
5. **Civil liability.** This is for many employers the eight hundred pound gorilla in the room. Lawsuits can be devastating to the employer, employees, profit, productivity, and to the business in general.

Taking into account these issues, we then have to ask several questions:

1. **What has the operator forgotten since their last training program three years ago?** Oh if only we all had photographic memories, but we don't!
2. **What unconscious habits have they developed since the last session?** Placing the hands or feet outside the overhead guard, or failing to check both sides before backing are habits easily learned, and unfortunately they come with a very heavy price at the most unexpected moment. This is why the hands-on evaluation is so important.
3. **Have they become over confident or complacent?** Both of these traits are recipes for disaster.

If you feel that the 94,000 plus forklift accidents that occur each year just can't happen at your workplace, I suggest that you remember that the 94,000 didn't think at some time that the accident could happen in their workplace either.

We buy name brand groceries, make sure that our vehicles are well maintained so our family members won't break down somewhere or get into an accident, we pay for insurance on our homes, cars, and health. But when it comes to training our forklift operators to prevent damage to our product, and lower the risk of serious injury or death to our employees, we now want to bargain shop?

At some point, principles have to outweigh profit. I have lost over the years several clients because I refuse to shortcut the training I know will save lives. Having been in this business almost twenty years, I have seen the aftermath of these accidents and I will not willingly participate in delivering less than the best that I can when training operators.

To those employers who think that they are saving money, and increasing their profit, I need to say this. **Just until the accident!** Once an accident occurs, all that you have saved or one, five, or even ten years will be gone in a flash!

An accident brings with it the loss in productivity while the accident is investigated, an unintentional slow down by employees now worried about their well being, thousands or even tens of thousands in fines from OSHA, and this is all before the lawsuit is filed. Believe me, it will be filed.

Armed with OSHA's report, depositions from your own employees and lawyers with blood and money in their eyes, the lawsuit will proceed. Ten of thousands, hundreds of thousands or even millions of dollars later you can continue your business.

It won't be the same, you will have OSHA occasionally looking over your shoulder, your company name will be attached to the lawsuit, which will resurface if another accident should occur to bolster the current lawsuit.

The sad part is that most of this is avoidable. Will properly training your operator guarantee no accidents will occur? Of course not. It will however show that you have delivered your best due diligence to protect your employees and your business. It will help lower your liability profile and let your employees know that they are an important part of your business.