



By Jason Hagerman

In warehouses, stacking storage units higher and closer together is a simple way to make the most of a confined space. Because of this, traditional counterbalanced forklifts are being replaced in many small-parts warehouses by order pickers. These machines are starkly different from forklifts, and bring many unique risks.

“An order picker basically looks like an elevator that drives, and they’re used for narrow aisle picking,” explains Sean McBurney, an Instructional Services Consultant with Liftow Training.

The operator, strapped to the platform with a harness and lanyard, raises himself and the platform to reach the desired shelf. He retrieves and places the object on a skid, which has been centered on the platform, and continues on to the next section of shelving without lowering the platform (unless lowering is necessary).

“When used according to training, these machines are a safe way to retrieve small amounts of stock from upper lev-

els,” says John Cunningham, an OSSA Corporate Account Manager.

Using the order picker, Cunningham says, contributes to a productive environment, allowing companies to stack shelves closer together. The order picker can save a company money when operated by a properly trained employee.

However, working with order pickers exposes operators to specific dangers not present with other types of lift trucks; for example:

- **Falls while operating at an elevated position:** “In 2007, fall protection accounted for 6,786 [*Occupational Health and Safety Act*] violations,” says McBurney. Most companies provide training, he says, since order pickers fall under forklift safety standards, but they neglect fall protection training, which is required for anybody working more than three metres from the ground.

- **Overloading:** This is one of the most significant dangers when operating an order picker, says Cunningham. Overloading can increase the risk of fall-

Strap In

Proper training and safety precautions will ensure employers and employees get the most out of order pickers

ing by altering the stability of the order picker, and can also obstruct the view of the operator. Tragically, two operators died earlier this year: one when the platform struck a post, and the other when the load caused the machine to flip backward.

Employers can minimize risk by setting speed limits and purchasing the optional safety features available on order pickers. “There are things like lift-limit indicators and scales that you can get as an option,” says Mike Lucas, a Toyota Lift Sales Rep.

However, training, says McBurney, is the most important thing a company can do. “Proper training ensures that workers have the background, tools and knowledge of the risks involved in operating these machines.”

Organizations such as Liftow Training offer fall protection courses designed to teach workers how to wear a harness properly, how to attach different kinds of lanyards and, in the event of a fall, how to fall in a way that minimizes injuries.

Forklift regulations require employers to provide operators with training refreshers every 18 months, and a theoretical session every three years.

You can also access tip sheets on order picking, proper lifting techniques, training goals and possible workplace hazards at the OSSA. ▲



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