

Safety News

Changing and Charging a Forklift Battery Safely

These days battery powered industrial forklifts are becoming increasingly popular due to their ability to be used in a variety of applications and industries. There are various styles of battery electric forklifts and range from small, motorized pallet trucks to much larger forklifts. Irrespective of the type of battery electric forklift that you may have, there are parallel hazards associated with their batteries and their maintenance.

Battery electric forklifts mostly use two types of batteries: nickel-iron and lead acid. Each of these batteries can pose serious health and safety hazards. These hazards occur due to three leading factors, the highly volatile gases emitted during charging, the sheer weight of the batteries and the corrosive chemicals that exist within the battery itself.

To minimise these hazards and any risks of danger Safe Work Australia suggests that people involved in a battery charging or changing operation should consider the following safety precautions:

- Only people who have received proper training should be allowed to charge and change batteries on industrial lift trucks
- Forklifts should be in a stationary position and the parking brake applied before attempting to change the battery.
- Ensure there is a designated area for battery charging and changing
- The designated installation area should be a smoke free zone, with clear signs indicating this
- Do not use mobile phones or other electronic devices.
- Remove all metallic jewellery before recharging and do not use metal objects that might strike a spark near battery cells.
- Ensure that battery charging/changing stations are equipped with the necessary safety equipment
- Wear eye protection and other Personal Protective Equipment as required.
- It is important there are washing facilities including eye washing and cleaning-up facilities for removing acid spills. If acid is spilt a 'spill kit' should be on hand to remove the hazard.
- Charging and Changing areas should be ventilated so gases generated during battery charging are dispersed to prevent an explosive mixture developing

Additionally, it is essential that workplaces have safety procedures in place to ensure that they are able to deal with unexpected dangerous situations that may arise. If forklift batteries are not dealt with in a safe and appropriate manner they can become extremely hazardous. That is why, it is extremely important that the changing and charging of batteries are completed in accordance to the manufacturer's instructions.

For further forklift safety information contact NFM on 02 9765 2043 or www.nfmforklifts.com.au. Information for this article was sourced from Safe Work Australia.

