Laborer Suffers Traumatic Brain Injury when Struck by Load Falling from Forklift

SUMMARY
A 37-year-old laborer at a potato packing plant suffered a severe traumatic brain injury when he was struck by a piece of metal falling from a load being moved by a forklift.

The victim had been employed for four years as a general laborer at his employer’s potato packing and shipping plant. On the day of the incident, the victim and another laborer were assisting their foreman who was operating a forklift to move a staircase platform. The metal platform with a staircase on either end was to be lifted, moved, and placed over a potato conveyor. The two staircases attached to the 6-foot platform had different numbers of steps: one staircase had 6 steps and the other 4 steps.

The foreman began moving the staircase platform with the forklift, but it was unbalanced, and tilting to the side, so he asked the two laborers to stand on the staircases to balance the load. The laborers got on to the staircases and the foreman picked up the load and began moving again. After about 20 feet, the forklift wheel hit a piece of angle iron on the floor that caused the forklift to stop suddenly. The staircase platform tilted to the side and fell off the forklift forks. Both workers fell about 8 feet to the floor. Several metal decking panels came off the platform and one struck the victim on the head. He suffered a serious traumatic brain injury and has been unable to return to work.

REQUIREMENTS
- Employers must not allow people to ride on powered industrial trucks unless a safe place to ride is provided. See WAC 296-307-52031(3)
- All loads must be stable or safely arranged. Exercise caution when handling off-center loads that cannot be centered. See WAC 296-307-52043(1)

RECOMMENDATIONS
FACE investigators concluded that, to help prevent similar occurrences, employers and workers should:
- Develop and implement standard safe loading procedures for forklifts, and ensure that workers follow the procedures.
- Workers should never stand on, under, in front of, or near a load being lifted and carried by a forklift.

RESOURCES
Powered Industrial Trucks (Forklifts). Washington State Department of Labor & Industries. www.Lni.wa.gov/Safety/Topics/AtoZ/PoweredIndustrialTrucks
Powered Industrial Trucks (Forklifts), Load Handling: Load Composition. OSHA. www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/pit/operations/loadcomposition

This narrative is an alert about the serious traumatic injury of a worker and is based on preliminary data ONLY and does not represent final determinations regarding the nature of the incident or the cause of the injury. Developed by WA State Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (FACE) Program and the Division of Occupational Safety and Health (OSHA), WA State Dept. of Labor & Industries. The FACE Program is supported in part by a grant from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH grant# 2U60OH008487). For more information visit www.Lni.wa.gov/Safety/Research/FACE.