

Manual Pallet Jack Safety

WHY THIS MATTERS

Manual pallet jacks are the most common material handling tool in warehouses, but they are far from risk-free. OSHA received nearly 200 reports of severe pallet jack injuries — hospitalizations and amputations — in just two years (2015–2016). The most common injuries are crushed feet and toes, hand and finger amputations, and lower-back strains from improper pushing and pulling.

~200

Severe pallet jack injuries reported to OSHA (2015–2016)

5,000 lb

Typical manual pallet jack load capacity

#1

Back strains are the most common pallet jack injury

5 Rules for Manual Pallet Jack Safety

Every worker using a manual pallet jack must follow these rules:

- 1 INSPECT BEFORE EVERY USE**
Check forks, wheels, hydraulic lift and handle — never use a defective jack.
- 2 PUSH, DON'T PULL**
Pushing gives you better control, visibility and reduces back strain.
- 3 NEVER EXCEED THE LOAD LIMIT**
Check the jack's rated capacity — overloading causes tip-overs and brake failure.
- 4 WEAR STEEL-TOE BOOTS**
Foot and toe crush injuries are the #1 cause of lost-time pallet jack injuries.
- 5 KEEP THE PATH CLEAR**
Walk the route first — remove obstacles, avoid inclines and watch for wet floors.

Before You Start — Quick Checklist

- | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Are forks straight and undamaged? | <input type="checkbox"/> Does the hydraulic lift raise and lower smoothly? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Are wheels free of flat spots and debris? | <input type="checkbox"/> Is the load stable and within the rated capacity? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Is the travel path clear of obstacles and spills? | <input type="checkbox"/> Are you wearing steel-toe boots and gloves? |

Key Hazards & Safe Practices

Crushed Feet/Toes: Always wear steel-toe boots. Never stand on or beside the forks while loaded.

Hand/Finger Crush: Keep hands on the handle only — never between the jack and racks, pallets or walls.

Back Strains: Push rather than pull. Use proper body mechanics — bend your knees, not your back.

Tip-Overs: Center the load, lower forks before moving, take wide turns. Avoid inclines with heavy loads.

Loading Docks: Never ride a pallet jack down a ramp. Block wheels before loading/unloading trailers.

Pedestrian Strikes: Always look ahead, use horn/voice at intersections, yield to foot traffic.

Common Mistakes That Cause Injuries

- ✗ Pulling the jack instead of pushing — reduces control and strains the lower back
- ✗ Riding on the forks or standing on the jack — it is not a scooter
- ✗ Moving with forks raised high — creates instability and blocks visibility
- ✗ Ignoring damaged wheels or bent forks — leads to tip-overs and loss of control

Safety Tips to Remember

- ✓ Push with both hands on the handle — keep your body behind the load at all times
- ✓ Lower the forks as close to the ground as possible before moving
- ✓ Take wide, slow turns — sharp turns tip loads and pinch hands against racks
- ✓ Park in designated areas with forks fully lowered — never leave a jack in an aisle

Discussion Questions for Your Team

1. When was the last time you inspected a pallet jack before using it?
2. Have you ever had a near-miss or injury with a pallet jack? What happened?
3. Do we push or pull our pallet jacks — and why does it matter?
4. Are there any inclines or uneven floors on our routes that create extra risk?
5. Where is the correct parking spot for our pallet jacks?

TOOLBOX TALK SIGN-OFF

Date: _____

Supervisor: _____

Project: _____

Location: _____

Attendance sheet attached: [] Yes