



EMPLOYER'S GUIDE

Employer Authorisation Explained

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Practical guidance for safer workplaces.

Who Authorises a Forklift Operator?

Employer Authorisation Explained

Completing forklift training does not, by itself, give an employee permission to operate a lift truck at work.

Once an operator has received the appropriate training and demonstrated that they are competent, the **employer should formally authorise them to operate the relevant lift truck or trucks in the workplace.**

This is an important distinction for employers.

A training certificate provides evidence of training and operating ability. **Authorisation is the employer's permission for that person to operate specified equipment within their workplace.**

Who Is Responsible for Authorising a Forklift Operator?

The employer is responsible for deciding who is permitted to operate workplace lift trucks.

HSE guidance in *Rider-operated lift trucks: Operator training and safe use (L117)* states that after employees have successfully completed all three elements of training, they should be given **written authorisation to operate the lift truck or trucks they have been trained to use.**

Those three stages are:

- Basic training
- Specific job training
- Familiarisation training

The employer should also be satisfied that the operator is competent before allowing them to use the equipment.

Is a Forklift Certificate the Same as Authorisation?

No.

This is a common source of confusion.

A forklift training certificate is evidence that an individual has received relevant training and achieved an appropriate level of operating ability.

It is **not a workplace licence and it does not automatically authorise someone to operate every forklift at every workplace.**

In fact, there is no government-issued forklift licence for operating lift trucks in the workplace.

An employer still needs to consider whether the employee is competent to operate the particular equipment they will use and whether they have received the necessary job-specific and familiarisation training.

What Should Written Authorisation Include?

HSE guidance recommends that authorisation identifies:

- The operator's name
- The date of authorisation
- The type or category of lift truck covered
- Any special conditions or operational limitations

Employers may issue individual written authorisations and/or maintain a central authorisation record.

The important point is that there should be clarity about **who is authorised to operate what**.

For example, an employee trained and authorised to operate a counterbalance forklift should not simply assume that this also permits them to operate a reach truck, pivot steer truck or other type of workplace equipment.

Additional or conversion training may be required before operating equipment for which they have not previously been trained.

Can Someone Operate a Forklift Without Authorisation?

HSE guidance states that people should not be allowed to operate lift trucks on the premises without authorisation, except where they are a trainee operating under close supervision.

This is why simply asking:

“Have you got a forklift certificate?”

isn't enough.

Employers should know:

Has this person received suitable training?

Are they competent to operate this type of truck?

Have they received the necessary workplace-specific training and familiarisation?

Have we authorised them to operate it?

Those are different questions.

What About a New Employee Who Already Has a Forklift Certificate?

A new employee may arrive with evidence of previous forklift training, but an employer should not automatically treat that certificate as permission to begin operating immediately.

The employer should establish whether the previous training is appropriate for the type of lift truck and work involved.

The operator may also need specific job training and familiarisation with the new workplace.

This could include:

- The particular lift trucks being used
- Site layout
- Traffic routes
- Pedestrian areas
- Racking and loading areas
- Site speed limits
- Local rules and procedures
- Typical loads
- Attachments
- Restricted areas
- Workplace hazards
- Emergency arrangements

Previous training can be valuable evidence of an operator's experience, but the employer still needs to be satisfied that the individual is competent for the work they are being asked to undertake.

Does Authorisation Last Forever?

Authorisation should not be treated as a one-time administrative exercise that is then forgotten.

Employers should continue to monitor authorised operators and make sure they remain competent.

A review may be appropriate following circumstances such as:

- Unsafe operating practices
- An accident or near miss
- A significant period without operating a lift truck
- Changes to the equipment being used
- Changes to the workplace or type of work
- Introduction of different attachments

- Evidence that operating standards have deteriorated

Refresher training may be appropriate where monitoring or assessment identifies a need.

The important principle is **continued competence**, rather than relying solely on the date printed on an old training certificate.

What Does PUWER Say About Forklift Training?

The Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 (PUWER) place duties on employers concerning the safe use of work equipment.

Regulation 9 requires employers to ensure that employees who use work equipment have received adequate training for health and safety purposes, including training relating to the methods of using the equipment, the risks involved and precautions that should be taken.

For rider-operated lift trucks, HSE's L117 Approved Code of Practice and guidance provides more detailed guidance on operator training and safe use.

Employers therefore need to consider both **training and competence**, rather than treating possession of a certificate as the end of the process.

Training, Competence and Authorisation Are Different

It can help to think of the process as:

Training → Assessment → Workplace Familiarisation → Employer Satisfied With Competence → Written Authorisation → Ongoing Monitoring

Each part has a purpose.

Training develops the operator's knowledge and practical skills.

Assessment provides evidence of operating ability.

Specific job and familiarisation training help the operator apply those skills to the equipment, tasks and conditions they will encounter at work.

The employer then determines whether the individual is competent and can be authorised to operate.

Monitoring helps make sure that competence is maintained afterwards.

Good Practice for Employers

Employers should maintain clear records showing which employees are authorised to operate particular categories or types of workplace equipment.

An effective authorisation system can include:

- Operator name
- Equipment category
- Training completed
- Training/assessment date
- Any restrictions
- Date authorised
- Person issuing the authorisation
- Review arrangements
- Relevant training records or certificate details

This makes it much easier for managers and supervisors to establish who should — and should not — be operating particular equipment.

It also helps prevent assumptions such as:

“They’ve driven forklifts before, so they’ll be fine.”

Supervisor Responsibilities Matter Too

Written authorisation only works if it is supported by effective workplace supervision.

Managers and supervisors should know who is authorised and should challenge unauthorised use.

They should also monitor operating standards and take appropriate action where unsafe practices develop.

That could include additional supervision, reassessment or refresher training depending on the circumstances.

Need Help With Forklift Operator Training?

GH Training provides **AITT Accredited forklift and workplace transport training** for businesses across the North West.

Training can include novice, experienced operator, refresher and conversion training across a range of workplace transport equipment.

We work with employers to provide practical training appropriate to their operators, equipment and workplace requirements.

For advice about forklift operator training or to discuss your company's requirements, contact **GH Training**.

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