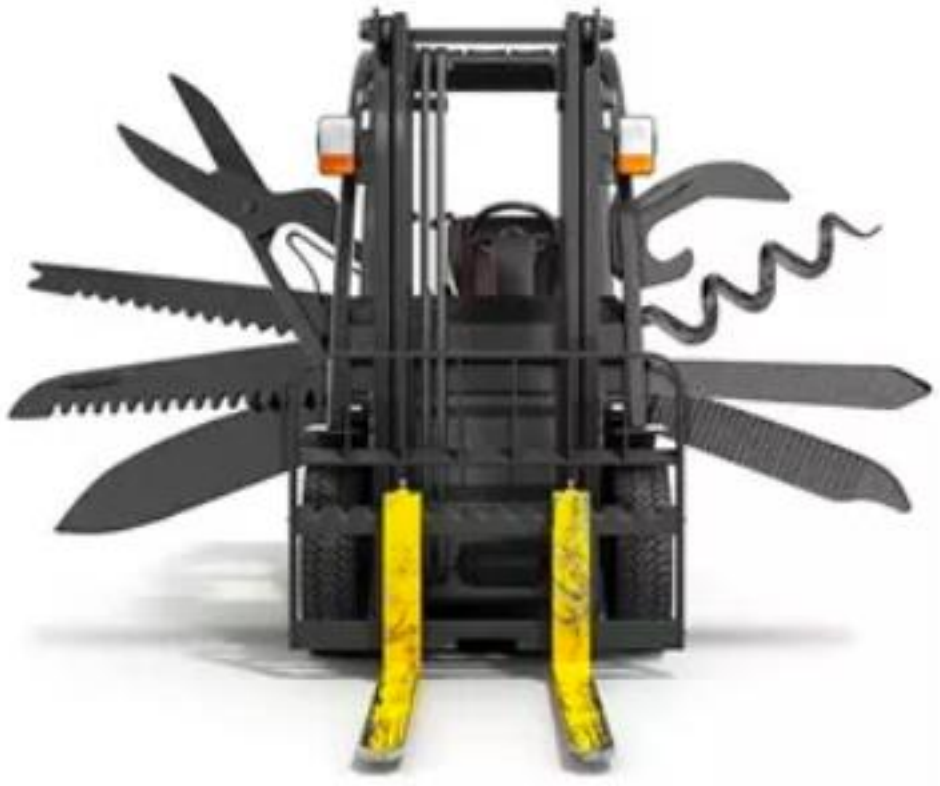
Forklift attachments – different equipment types to use



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To safely use fork attachments, operators must receive specific training for each attachment type, attach them securely to the forklift according to the manufacturer's instructions, and be aware that the addition of an attachment reduces the forklift's load capacity and stability. Always check that the attachment is suitable for the truck and load, properly secured with the provided locking device, and that the load is balanced and centered on the forks.

Before Use

1. **Check the attachment:**

   Ensure it has a valid test certificate and is free from damage, such as distortion or cracks in load-bearing parts.

2. **Inspect the forklift:**

   Verify the attachment is correctly matched to the forklift truck's forks.

3. **Training and documentation:**

   Confirm that the operator has received specific training for that particular attachment and that it's appropriate for the type of load.

4. **Understand load capacity:**
   Be aware that attachments reduce the forklift's safe handling capacity (de-rated capacity. The maximum load capacity should be clearly labelled.

Attaching the Attachment

1. **Position the forks:** Adjust the forks on the forklift to the correct distance apart.
2. **Slide the attachment:** Slide the fork attachment over the existing forks.
3. **Secure the locking device:** Lock the attachment in place using the provided heel pins and safety lynch pins to prevent it from slipping.

Operation

1. **Load stability:** Always keep loads as close to the mast as possible for better balance.
2. **Even load distribution:** Ensure the load is evenly distributed across the forks.
3. **Slow and gentle operation:** Drive at a slow speed and make turns slowly and gently, as the attachment can change the forklift's handling behavior.
4. **Visibility:** Be aware that longer forks can affect visibility, so communicate clearly with other workers or spotters.
5. **Avoid overloading:** Do not exceed the forklift's adjusted capacity or pick up loads with the tip of the fork extension.

What Are The Risks Associated With Using Forklift Attachments?

There is a very real risk of serious injury to both forklift operators and pedestrians whilst using forklift attachments when.

(1) A Risk Assessment Has Not Being Carried Out

In every case, a proper risk assessment should be carried out to ensure the suitability of any new forklift attachment for its intended purpose.

Taking, for example, a four – fork attachment which is designed for the safe handling of wide unstable loads. Whilst it can reduce the associated risks of doing just that, when an uneven surface is introduced, this can cause the product to slide off the attachment. It's important to fully consider not only the intended task but also the environment within which the attachment will operate.

(2) There's a Lack of Understanding about How an Attachment Can Affect a Forklift's Operation

An attachment can alter how a forklift truck operates, so it's important to consider this for both safe and efficient use. For example, when selecting a lifting jib attachment, where there is potential for a 'swinging' load and movement of the attachment, a 'fixed length' design is best. Wide carriage backplates can reduce sideways movement to offer a safe, stable load lifting option, reducing damage from loads swinging excessively.

(3) Failure to Understand How the Forklift Attachment Can Impact the Forklift's Lifting Capacity

It's never a good idea to overload the lifting capacity of your host truck. But if the forklift attachment is rated with a higher lifting capacity than a truck can handle, it can become especially dangerous. Give careful consideration to the capacity ratings to avoid both safety risks and unnecessary wear and tear.

(4) Using an Inappropriate Forklift Attachment for the Task at Hand

Using an attachment that is not fit for purpose can prove inefficient, damaged goods, or worse still, be dangerous. One does still hear of catastrophic consequences when personnel have been lifted for working at height using inappropriate equipment, such as a pallet or even just forks.

With such a wide range of attachments available there really is no excuse, and, with a little forethought, you can ensure your attachments are not only absolutely safe but also appropriate, keeping you running at your most efficient.

Safety Factors to Take Into Consideration When Using Forklift Attachments

There are many factors to consider in the smooth and safe operating of forklift attachments, such as.

(1) Are The Manufacturer's Operating Instructions Being Followed?

Pay attention specifically to things like load capacity and de-rated load capacity. The Safe Working Load of the forklift attachment should be clearly labelled and identified on the product at all times.

(2) Make Sure the Attachment Is Correctly Matched To the Forklift

With the majority of forklift attachments being of the fork-mounted variety, it's important to ensure the sizing of the attachment fits that of the forklift truck. Using fork pockets that are too large could compromise any securing methods and pose a safety risk.

(3) Has The Operator Been Adequately Trained in Using The Attachment?

It is imperative that the operator is adequately trained in both the safe securing and operation of the attachment. Proper training should be provided before use and should be updated where necessary.

(4) Is The Attachment Properly Rated?

Ensure the forklift attachment is properly rated, paying close attention to how this affects your forklift truck's safe handling capacity. This is known as the 'De-Rated' capacity and is affected by many factors such as the weight of the attachment, combined with the weight of the product to be handled, and the distance from the attachment to the forklift truck.

(5) Is The Correct Forklift Attachment Being Used for The Task?

Never 'make do' with an attachment that is not specifically designed for the material handling task at hand. Not only can this cause damage or potentially render insurance invalid, but it can also prove dangerous.

(6) Has The Attachment Undergone Its Thorough Examination?

Under LOLER 98 and PUWER 98, it is your legal responsibility to ensure that your forklift attachments undergo a periodic Thorough examination. Not only will having these inspections carried out ensure you remain compliant, but more importantly, they will ensure your forklift attachments remain safe and fit for purpose.

Key Safety Questions for Forklift Attachments

- **Capacity and Stability**:

  "How does the attachment affect the forklift's load capacity and stability?"

- **Compatibility**:

  "Is the attachment compatible with the specific forklift model, and has a written approval been obtained from the manufacturer?"

- **Attachment Inspection**:

  "What specific pre-use checks should be made for this attachment to ensure it is in good working order?"

- **Operational Controls**:

  "What are the specific hydraulic control procedures for using this attachment, and are there any new or modified operating steps?"

- **Visibility and Stability**:

  "Does the attachment reduce the operator's visibility, and are there procedures in place to compensate for this?"

- **Maintenance and Wear**:

  "Who is responsible for providing maintenance and replacement parts for the attachment?"

- **Regulatory Compliance**:
  "Are the attachment and its use compliant with the relevant health and safety legislation in my area, such as the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974?"

Training Focus Areas

- **Attachment Identification**:

  Operators must identify the type of attachment being used and understand its function.

- **Pre-Use Checks**:

  Specific checks for attachments include verifying them against the forklift's information plate for compatibility and approval.

- **Hydraulic Controls**:

Operators need to understand how to operate the attachment's specific hydraulic controls.

- **Load Handling**:

  Training should cover how attachments alter load capacity, centre of gravity, and overall stability.

- **Visibility and Manoeuvring**:

  Operators must learn to account for any changes in visibility or stability caused by the attachment.

- **Emergency Procedures**:
  Operators should know how to react safely when using a forklift with an attachment.

By addressing these questions, training programs can ensure forklift operators understand the unique safety considerations of different attachments.

There's no doubt that forklift attachments – used correctly and in the relevant circumstances – can boost the efficiency of your operations.

But with an ever-growing array of attachments available and new forklift trucks joining the market all the time, how can you be sure that you're choosing the right one for the job?

And be sure you must, as the consequences of 'making do' are serious, yet unfortunately far too commonplace in the industry.

In recent months, we've seen multiple falls from makeshift working platform attachments hit the headlines, leading to extensive injuries for those involved and no doubt some serious questions asked of those responsible for the safety of their operations.

Used properly, attachments can aid operational safety, as well as efficiency. So, to help you reap the benefits and avoid the pitfalls, we've put together a simple six-point guide to safe selection…

1. Is it suitable for use with your lift truck?

Remember, when you fit an attachment to a forklift truck, the truck's rated capacity is reduced. This is known as derating and to demonstrate this, before the truck is used with the attachment, a new capacity plate specifically relating to the attachment should be applied to the truck. (However, the base capacity will not change, nor will the category.)

If you find that your required task is outside the truck's revised rated capacity, don't attempt to complete it. If you have any concerns over an attachment's suitability for use or the appropriate derating, contact your manufacturer/supplier for advice.

2. Is it fit for purpose?

It's vital that you use an attachment suited to the task in question. Using equipment for tasks they weren't designed to complete puts you and your colleagues at risk. For example, if you need to use your truck to lift personnel, then an appropriate working platform is necessary, as per HSE Guidance Note PM28 (Version 4). As we've seen, the use of an improvised or open-sided box, a pallet or even just forks, often has devastating results.

And if you do have the perfect attachment to make the task safer – use it! Don't let convenience or complacency stop you from using the right equipment for the job.

3. Can it be safely secured?

Your attachment may be mounted on to the forks or directly onto the carriage. Make sure it can be fastened securely and won't interfere with the mast structure during raising or lowering. Always follow the manufacturer/supplier's instructions for fitting and use.

4. Can it be safely connected?

Regardless of whether an attachment is operated manually or hydraulically, you must ensure it can be safely connected. The forklift truck and attachment must be compatible (if you're not sure, the truck manufacturer and the supplier of the attachment should be able to advise) and they should be connected by someone who has been trained in how to do so safely.

5. Is it fit for use?

It's no good having the right attachment for the job if it isn't fit to use. You must ensure it has passed any relevant inspections and examinations before use. Under the Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations 1998 (LOLER), your lift truck and attachment should be examined every 12 months, or every 6 months if lifting personnel. The operator should also confirm that the attachment is working properly as part of the pre-use inspection of the forklift.

6. Has the operator been trained in its use?

As we've explained, adding a forklift attachment changes how your truck behaves. So, any operators who aren't trained in the safe use of the appropriate attachment are exposed to some very real risks.

It cannot be emphasised strongly enough that attachments need to be included in training, as their use affects such crucial aspects of forklift operation as basic handling and stability.

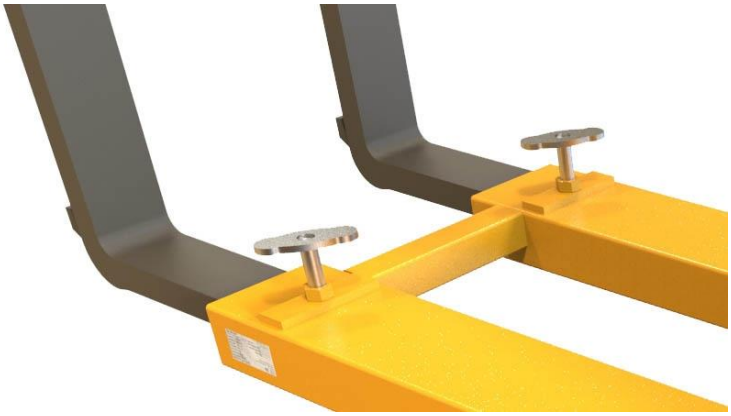
Regardless of what type of attachment(s) you use, some type of operator training will be required by Law. The most commonly used attachment should be covered while completing the three stages of forklift training set out in L117 and any further attachments require conversion training before use. (And don't forget, standard forks count as an attachment.)

'Never make do'

A good rule of thumb regards forklift attachments is 'never make do' – whether that's during the selection process, fitting, inspection or operator training. Following this not only reduces the risk of accidents and serious injuries for operators and their colleagues, but it ensures you and your business meet your legal requirements and remain profitable, by limiting costly damage and disruption.

Forklift attachments are used by many companies on a daily basis and due to familiarity, it can be easy to become complacent when it comes to safety requirements. If used incorrectly, forklift trucks can do some serious damage - potentially causing serious harm to yourself and others. Here are our top tips for ensuring safety of your forklift attachment.

Make Sure the Forklift Attachment and the Forklift Forks Are Correctly Matched



With the majority of forklift attachments being of the fork-mounted variety (where the operator drives the forks of the forklift into the pockets of the attachment) it's important to ensure the sizing of the attachment fits that of the forklift truck. For example, using fork pockets that are too large for the forks, any securing methods on the attachments could be compromised.

Check Your Forklift Truck's De-Rated Load Capacity

When fitting a forklift attachment, the capacity of the forklift truck is affected. This is known as the 'De-Rated' capacity. The weight of the attachment, combined with the weight of the product to be handled and the distance from the attachment to the forklift truck will all have a bearing on the forklift's lifting capacity. It's important, therefore, that you check how your attachment will affect your truck's safe handling capacity. If in doubt, always check with your forklift supplier.

Is the Forklift Attachment Fit for Purpose?

Never 'make do' with using a forklift attachment that has not been specially designed for the material handling task at hand. Using an attachment in the wrong way can hurt you and others around you, not to mention cause damage to the product and potentially render insurance invalid.

Securing the forklift attachment to the truck safely is paramount. The majority of fork-mounted attachments will come with either retaining pins, retaining bars (both of which lock behind the heel of the fork) or 'T' Screw clamps (which clamp down onto the top of the fork). Safety chains that fasten to the forklift carriage may also be used on some attachments such as forklift tipping skips for added safety. Never use your forklift attachment if it is missing any of these securing methods.

Check When Your Latest LOLER Inspection Was Carried Out

Under LOLOER 98, your forklift attachment must undergo a periodic thorough examination (6 monthly or yearly dependant on the type of attachment) which is akin to a car's MOT. If your forklift attachment has not undergone this examination and inspection in accordance with the schedule, you may be at risk of prosecution by the HSE. It can also invalidate insurance and put you and others around you at higher risk. Look out for the Thorough Examination date reminder which should be easily identifiable on your attachment.

Does the Attachment Have a Valid Test Certificate

Without a valid test certificate, your forklift attachment would be deemed illegal and not fit for use. Any of these could impact the validity of your test certificate:

- Has your attachment been inspected in accordance with its Thorough Examination obligations?
- Has your attachment undergone any remedial work and not been recertified?

Conclusion

Whatever industry you work in, whether construction, logistics, or pharmaceutical, you have a duty of care to ensure that your attachment and all equipment used with your forklift truck are legal, fit for purpose, and above all, safe. For any questions about LOLER certification, load handling capacities, or design or securing methods, please contact a member of the Ribble Valley Attachments team today.