Shoddy Procedures Result in Tragedy

A forklift driver moving scrap wood died when he was crushed between the forklift and a dumpster.

He had hauled the load of discarded shingles to a remote section of the yard. A metal dump hopper containing the scrap wood was attached to the forks. The operator drove up to the dumpster and positioned the forklift. He got off his vehicle without setting the parking brake and tripped the handle of the metal dump hopper. As the load dropped, the forklift jerked. The transmission, low on fluid, slipped into gear. The forklift traveled toward the dumpster, pinning the driver. He died of chest injuries.

Failure to set the parking brake and poor vehicle maintenance were among factors contributing to this fatality.

The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety lists these as some of the factors leading to forklift accidents:

- Workers are not trained properly.
- Production pressures encourage them to drive too fast.
- Forklifts are poorly maintained, with defective braking, steering, transmission, hydraulic, signaling or safety systems.
- Operators are working in narrow, crowded or cluttered aisles.
- Obstructions at intersections and doors prevent them from seeing pedestrians and hazards.
- Forklifts are working in high traffic areas and areas with a mix of motorized and pedestrian traffic.
- They are traveling over ramps with different surfaces or a loading dock in poor condition.
- Operators are distracted by conditions such as noise, odors, toxic gases, dust or poor lighting.

Forklift safety violations are among the top 10 citations issued by the Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) in the United States each year.