



Heavy Equipment: The Basics

The safe use of heavy equipment is critical when machinery such as bulldozers, graders, or ground-moving equipment is used to assist with the construction of new homes, bridges, or shopping malls. The size and weight of these heavy machines make them extremely hazardous; proper operation is required to avoid serious injury or death. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, heavy equipment injuries are a frequent occurrence during the construction of roads or commercial properties.

Prior to the start of a project, inspect all heavy machinery. Heavy equipment inspection is **crucial** in ensuring that everything is in working condition and ready for safe operation. A visual inspection is not enough. Physically check the equipment for issues such as torn belts, worn brakes and hoses, leaking hydraulics, etc.

When storing machinery, ensure that the component parts are properly secured or disabled. Just because equipment is in the “off” position does not necessarily mean it is safe. Moving parts such as blades and saws have the potential to cause injury. When storing away mobile equipment, make sure that brakes are in the locked position. The owner’s manuals for the equipment should provide you with detailed information on how to properly secure equipment when not in use.

Even the most experienced of operators may find operating heavy equipment a challenge at times. Weather conditions such as rainy weather could cause a shift in the ground under a backhoe. A strong breeze could affect the balance of a crane. In addition, operators should also never work while impaired or under the effects of medication. Worksites should be constantly monitored for unsafe operating conditions.

Safety requirements vary depending upon the type of heavy machinery. For example, regulations for operating a bulldozer will differ vastly from a forklift or a loader. Some machinery also may require the use of a commercial drivers’ license and an approved training course. Employees must be properly trained on each piece of equipment that they operate.

Cal/OSHA regulations are in place to ensure safe operation. The types of requirements depend on the type of construction activities performed. For additional information, including requirements refer to Cal/OSHA Title 8 regulations.

As the employer, you have a responsibility for the health and well-being of your employees. Ensuring that you and your employees become familiar with safe work practices with heavy equipment will keep jobsites free of injury.

Sunil Sharma, Managing Editor

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