

Pallet Jacks: Leave Room for the Operator

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Why this matters

A pallet can clear a doorway while the operator's hand, foot or body cannot. Plan space for the person, handle and load throughout the move.

Objective: Confirm a pallet-jack route protects the walking operator and others.

Key hazards or failure points

Feet under wheels or forks; trapping against walls; unstable loads; damaged pallets; unexpected slopes; blocked sightlines.

Practical controls

- Identify whether the jack is manual or powered. Use trained operators, the actual instructions and the employer's authorization requirements.
- Match the jack's capacity and permitted use to the load, pallet and route. Never ride a jack not designed and authorized for riding.
- Keep people out of the travel and lowering area. Plan the operator's position and stopping space under the model instructions; never brace a moving load with your body.

Verify It in the Field

With the jack secured, inspect wheels, forks, handle and load support under its instructions. Confirm readable capacity and actual load information.

Assess the route safely before moving: turns, thresholds, slopes, edges and the receiving position. Identify where the operator could become trapped.

The trained operator performs the prescribed safe function checks in a clear area. Record results; never use a person as an obstacle to test protection.

Stop and reassess

Hold the move for a damaged pallet, faulty control, unstable load or inadequate clearance. If the load cannot be controlled, keep people clear and get the appropriate help.

Ask the crew

1. Where could the handle or load trap someone?
2. What changes if this jack is powered?
3. Is the receiving position ready?

Use this HOP tool — Task preview: Before the first move, trace the operator's route alongside the pallet route from a safe position. Identify one place where a turn or lowering step could trap a person. Resolve that space constraint and explain the revised move before operating the jack.

Sources: OSHA 1910.178, 1926.602; DOE Vol. 2, pp. 6–7. HOP concepts adapted from DOE-HDBK-1028-2009, Vol. 2 (June 2009). No claim to original U.S. Government work; no government endorsement implied.

Free next step: JHA/JSA planning and field-verification worksheet

Expanded guidance and separate forms: toddjeromejenkins.com/toolbox-talks/pallet-jacks-operator-crush-space