Workplace Transport Safety: Keeping Vehicles and Pedestrians Apart

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The Risk Hiding in Plain Sight

Every year, people are killed or seriously injured by vehicles in workplaces: struck by forklifts in warehouses, crushed by reversing lorries in yards, hit by vans crossing a car park. Vehicles and people share the same space in plain view, yet the risk persists because everyone involved has done the same manoeuvre a thousand times without incident. Familiarity is not a control measure, and it is usually cited afterwards as the reason nobody thought to change the layout or tighten the rule.

What makes workplace transport different from many other risks is that the fixes are rarely expensive or technical. Good site layout, clear rules and basic discipline prevent many incidents. The organisations that get this wrong are not usually the ones without a system; they are the ones whose system has drifted away from how the site actually operates, because the yard has changed, the fleet has grown, or contractors now share the space and nobody has updated the arrangements.

What the Law Actually Requires

The core legal duty sits with the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, which requires employers

to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of employees and anyone else affected by the work, including visiting drivers, contractors and members of the public. The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 add specific requirements for traffic routes: they must be suitable for the people and vehicles using them, sufficient in number, suitably located, and organised so that vehicles and pedestrians can move around safely, with separation where necessary.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 require a suitable and sufficient risk assessment of workplace transport, covering the site, the vehicles and the people who drive and work around them. This is not a one-off document. It should be reviewed whenever the layout, fleet, traffic volume or workforce changes, and checked at a set interval, commonly annually, so that it reflects how the site operates now. The Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 (PUWER) apply to vehicles used at work, covering suitability, maintenance and the competence of those who operate them.

Think in Three Parts: Site, Vehicle, Driver

Safe site

Layout does more to prevent incidents than any rulebook. The goal is to keep vehicles and pedestrians apart, and where they must meet, to make that meeting predictable and controlled.

- Separate pedestrian routes using physical barriers where possible, not just painted lines, with marked crossing points where routes must cross
- One-way systems to reduce reversing, which features in a disproportionate share of serious workplace transport incidents
- Designated parking, loading and unloading areas, with a safe place for drivers to wait away from the vehicle during loading
- Good lighting, particularly in yards during winter months, and convex mirrors at blind corners and building exits
- Speed limits that are genuinely enforced, supported by physical measures such as speed humps or chicanes where drivers routinely ignore signage
- Pedestrian exclusion zones around high-risk operations such as forklift battery charging bays and racking aisles during active picking

Safe vehicle

- Daily pre-use checks carried out by the driver, with a clear route for reporting defects and a rule that a defective vehicle is taken out of service, not worked around
- Planned preventive maintenance covering brakes, steering, tyres, lights, horns and warning devices, with records kept
- Reversing aids fitted where appropriate: cameras, proximity sensors, audible alarms and amber flashing beacons
- Seat belts or operator restraint systems fitted and actually worn, particularly on

counterbalance lift trucks, where a restraint prevents the instinctive but often fatal reaction to jump clear of a tipping truck

Safe driver

- Formal training and site authorisation for every vehicle type; forklift operators need basic training from a recognised provider plus specific and familiarisation training for your particular site, loads and equipment
- Refresher training at sensible intervals, and after an incident, a near miss or a significant change to the vehicle or site
- Clear site rules given to visiting drivers before or on arrival, in plain language, covering speed limits, pedestrian routes and reporting points
- Supervision that challenges shortcuts early, before an unsafe habit becomes accepted custom and practice on site

Reversing: The Persistent Killer

If you only fix one thing, fix reversing. Design it out wherever you can with one-way systems and drive-through loading bays, so vehicles simply never need to go backwards across an area used by people. Where reversing cannot be avoided, control it properly: a designated reversing area kept clear of pedestrians and other vehicles, a trained banksman using pre-agreed signals and standing where the driver can always see them, and an absolute rule that if the driver loses sight of the banksman, the vehicle stops immediately rather than continuing on guesswork.

This is also where many sites quietly fail, because the rule exists on paper but is not enforced when the yard is busy, the delivery is late, or the usual banksman is off sick. A workplace transport arrangement only works if it survives pressure, so check periodically that the rule holds when things are not calm.

Who Is Responsible, and What to Keep on File

Overall responsibility for workplace transport safety sits with the employer, usually discharged through site management, but specific duties should be allocated clearly rather than left implied. A transport manager or site manager typically owns the layout and traffic routes; supervisors own day-to-day enforcement of rules and reporting of near misses; drivers own pre-use checks and compliance with site rules; and a competent person, whether in-house or external, should periodically review the whole arrangement against current risk and guidance.

A compliant arrangement in practice is supported by a short but real set of records: the current workplace transport risk assessment and its review date, a site traffic plan showing routes and exclusion zones, training and authorisation records for every driver, vehicle maintenance and daily check logs, and a near-miss and incident log that is actually looked at rather than filed. These records matter for two reasons. They demonstrate that reasonably practicable steps have been taken if something goes wrong, and, more usefully, they tend to surface the pattern of near misses before someone is seriously hurt. Where an incident does happen, a proper investigation looking at

root causes, not just the immediate act, is essential; this is the kind of work covered by accident investigation support where an independent view is useful.

Do Not Forget the Occasional Traffic

The daily forklift operation usually gets the attention, because it is visible and constant. The risks that slip through the gaps are the occasional ones: the skip lorry that comes monthly, the visiting tanker, contractors' vans during a refit, or a delivery driver wandering across the yard looking for goods-in because nobody has signposted the route. Walk your site as a stranger would and look for places with no sign, no barrier and no obvious rule.

This matters particularly in sectors where vehicle movements are frequent and varied, such as warehousing and logistics sites with constant goods-in and goods-out traffic, and construction sites where plant, delivery vehicles and visiting trades share a changing layout week to week.

Getting a Fresh Pair of Eyes

Many workplace transport problems are easier to spot from the outside, because familiarity dulls the eye to what has become normal. A structured review of your site layout, vehicle fleet and driver arrangements, carried out as part of a wider health and safety audit or general consultancy support, often identifies gaps that daily routine has made invisible.

Integral Safety works with businesses across the East Midlands on exactly this kind of review. If your yard or warehouse needs that outside view, get in touch to talk through what a site visit would cover.

Talk to Integral Safety Ltd

We are health and safety consultants based in Coalville, Leicestershire, working with businesses across the East Midlands. If anything in this guide applies to your workplace, we can help.

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This guide is general information about UK health and safety law and practice, correct as at 11 November 2026. It is not advice on your particular circumstances. The latest version is at https://integralsafetyltd.co.uk/blog/workplace-transport-safety-keeping-vehicles-and-people-apart.