SHARP START

March 12 — Silent In Reverse

When borrowing a customer's forklift, I noticed that the backup alarm did not work giving potential for someone to be hit.

Reported to Customer to have it fixed.

A forklift was placed into service with a non-functioning backup alarm. The machine still drove. It still lifted. It still moved loads.

But one of its warning systems was silent.

Forklifts have limited visibility, especially in reverse. Backup alarms are engineered controls designed to alert pedestrians that heavy equipment is moving in their direction. On active jobsites with noise, congestion, and multiple trades working in close proximity, that audible warning can be the only signal someone gets.

If the warning system doesn't work, the machine doesn't work.
Silent equipment is dangerous equipment.
Engineering controls exist for a reason.

Without it, a forklift can move backward without notice. And forklifts do not stop quickly once they're in motion.

This wasn't about not knowing forklifts are dangerous. It was about tolerating a missing safety control because everything else appeared functional.

But safety systems are not optional add-ons. When one fails, the machine should not operate.

Hazards

- Pedestrian struck by forklift
- Crushing injury
- Pinned between equipment and structure
- Limited visibility blind-spot incident
- Property damage
- Secondary injuries from evasive reaction

Stats

- Struck-by incidents involving mobile equipment are a leading cause of serious workplace injury.
- Forklift-related injuries account for thousands of injuries annually.
- Reverse travel is a common factor in pedestrian incidents.
- Engineering controls like backup alarms significantly reduce pedestrian exposure risk.

Humans at Work

Forklifts are everywhere. We see them all day. Because they're common, they stop feeling dangerous. That's familiarity at work. Then optimism creeps in: "It'll be fine. I'll watch my mirrors. Nobody's behind me." When nothing bad has happened before, we start believing nothing bad will happen this time. Heavy equipment doesn't need bad intentions to cause harm. It just needs one missed step, one person in the blind spot, one moment without a warning. Just because it hasn't happened yet doesn't mean it won't.

Pause and Think

- Are all audible and visual warning systems functioning?
- Has the equipment been properly inspected before use?
- Would you stand behind it while it reverses?