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The Human Counterweight

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Every powered industrial truck has a placard from the manufacturer indicating the lifting capacity of the vehicle based on its engineered design and attachments. One of the key responsibilities of any operator of such equipment is to know that capacity and ensure they don't exceed it by lifting objects

heavier than it is designed to lift.

In New Zealand in 2010 An employee for a construction firm and an employee of another company were unloading two-tonne (2,000 kg) masonry blocks from the back of a truck using a small skid steer (bobcat type vehicle) as a forklift. However, the vehicle only had a capacity of 815 kg.

The operator of the skid steer asked the other worker to get on the back of the vehicle to counter the weight of the block as he attempted to lift them.

When the driver lowered the block quickly to the ground the other worker was flung about 2.5m in the air. He landed on the roof of the vehicle and then fell to the ground, breaking both wrists and two ribs. The injuries could have been much more serious.

In looking at this incident there are several issues to look at.

- Operator's must know and cannot exceed the capacity of their vehicles.
- If the load is heavier than the vehicle is rated to lift, then another vehicle must be used.
- Passengers are not allowed on such vehicles. There is a designated seat for every person allowed . . . if it only has one seat, only one person is allowed on the vehicle.
- And of course, the operator and the other worker did not consider the act of using a human being as a counter weight a safety hazard.

How about you? Have you placed yourself or a coworker in the danger zone while trying to accomplish a task when the tools you currently have nearby just aren't the proper ones? Think about it! We do it more than we'd like to admit. Remember, when it's man against machine, the machine will win . . . it's just a matter of time.

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