



### ***Forklift Operator's Manual – Should You Read It?***

A few years back, I trained two operators at a small company that had four months before purchased a new 3-wheel forklift. As I set up for class in the company's small lunch room, one of the operators complained about the forklift. He said it was the "biggest piece of junk" and he hated operating it. The other operator remained silent. Concerned, I asked specifically what problem he was having with the truck. He said, "I go home every day with sore arms, shoulders, back, and knees." He further stated vehemently, "that is the most uncomfortable truck I've ever operated!" Out of concern to get the class done, I asked if we could get going on the operator training, and I promised I would work with the salesman and the company to see if we could rectify his complaint. He agreed.

After class, the unhappy operator was the first to jump in the seat, and show how uncomfortable the truck was. As he stretched his arms out to maximum reach for the steering wheel, he slid the seat all the way forward, almost hitting his knees into the dash. I thought the answer to his problem couldn't be this easy. I reached to the bottom of the column near the dash and lifted the tilt column lever allowing the steering column to tilt downward between his knees. It honestly looked like his jaw fell off his face and hit the floor plate of the truck. He had no idea the truck had a tilt column! He had been driving around with the column in the straight up position for four months. That position wasn't even really meant for operation, but to allow the battery to be lifted out of the battery compartment.

When the (up to this point) quiet operator had witnessed my instruction on the tilt column lever, he exclaimed, "oh man, I can't believe you showed him that!" He further explained that he witnessed the complaining operator get on the truck the very first time with the column straight up and he saw opportunity! He said for four months, every time he got off the truck, he made sure the column was back in the upright position and then he would point and laugh as the other operator rode by with his knees in the dash and his back and arms stretched forward.

Moral to this story:

**Read your operator's manual.** I opened the sealed plastic on the four-month old operator's manual, and showed him the page detailing the tilt column lever. Not only will you learn about proper safety information, but you will learn about fantastic features and benefits on your truck that could make your day a little less painful!

-- Tony Jones, Corporate Safety Trainer