



OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY SECTION
AMERICAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION

Zev Shalev
Executive Producer, CBS Early Show
51 West 52nd Street
New York, NY 10019

November 18, 2009

Dear Mr. Shalez:

We are writing to express our extreme disappointment at the insensitivity of your hosts, Harry Smith and Maggie Rodriguez, while commenting on a serious work-related incident involving a forklift at a Russian vodka warehouse. As a news organization, your staff should recognize that dozens of workers in the U.S. are killed every year on-the-job while using forklifts, many others U.S. workers are injured, and there are an untold number of forklift-related deaths in workplaces across the globe. Driving a forklift is considered a high-risk work task, and is the reason that U.S. Department of Labor and State regulations prohibit individuals under 18 years of age to operate them. Your host's comment that "no one was hurt," may be true in this instance, but many workers are not as fortunate. Just ask the families of workers killed on-the-job by forklifts, including the Iowa worker killed in February 2009 at a plastics plant or the worker killed in May 2009 at a Georgia auto dealer.

Mr. Smith erroneously blames the worker at the Russian warehouse for the incident, saying he "loses control" of the vehicle. In reality, when forklift incidents and near-misses are investigated, the root cause of both fatal- and non-fatal incidents pinpoint improper maintenance of the brakes and steering, and inadequate training of the workers who are expected to operate this equipment. Ms. Rodriguez expressed an even more offensive blame-the-worker theme, suggesting that the worker was intoxicated:

"I hope the forklift operator wasn't taking some of the supply, and that's why (pause), [making hand signals suggesting the worker was drunk]" Mr. Smith's retort: "would ya think?"

We learned of The Early Show's profile of this forklift incident while gathered in Philadelphia last week for the American Public Health Association's (APHA) annual meeting. APHA is the largest and most diverse public health organization in the world, and our Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Section was marking its 95th anniversary this year. We invite you to contact us to learn more about the causes of, as well as the social, physical and emotional costs of, work-related injury, disease and death. We suggest you reach out to United Support and Memorial for Workplace Fatalities, (www.usmwf.org) a national support network for family members who have lost a loved one due to unsafe or unhealthy working conditions. In the OHS community, we remember workers' lives lost on International Worker Memorial Day (April 28) and this year will mark the 40th anniversary of the Occupational Safety and Health Act. We would be pleased to serve as a resource to your staff.

Sincerely,

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