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CASE STUDY
Unilock - Midwest

HOW UNILOCK REDUCED OPERATING COSTS & INCREASED EQUIPMENT LIFE WITH LINDE FORKLIFTS

Opportunity: Unilock – a leading national hardscape company – needed the right fleet of forklifts to keep 15 million square feet of product moving while also providing operator comfort & visibility in 48" outdoor aisles.

Solution: Wolter recommended that Unilock switch to Linde IC forklifts, which reduced operating costs across the board.

- **Maintenance cost:** $6/hr. → $3.50/hr.
- **Equipment life:** 10,000 → up to 20,000 operating hours
- **Service life:** 4 years → 7 years
- **Oil-change interval:** 500 → 1,000 hrs.
- **Space preserved:** est. 45,000 sq. ft.

For Unilock, forklifts are essential to keeping the operation moving.

Unilock provides North America with a wide range of quality hardscape products, including pavers, slabs, retaining walls, fire features, stairs & coping. At its Midwest operation in Aurora, Illinois, more than 15 million square feet of hardscape product moves from manufacturing to inventory & onto trucks each year.

The 37-acre facility holds more than seven million square feet of inventory & handles up to 75 outbound truckloads a day. Nearly all products are moved by forklift.



Unilock's Aurora, IL forklift fleet handles over 15 million square feet of hardscape product every year.



Linde forklifts help Unilock efficiently handle hardscape products in a harsh outdoor environment.

"In the hardscape industry, the forklift is really the bread & butter of how to get customers in & out," said Jon Harn, Senior Plant Manager for Unilock Midwest.

Unilock's forklifts operate indoors & outdoors, handling heavy loads, tight spaces, frequent stops & starts, & long operating hours.

With its previous Caterpillar fleet, maintenance costs reached as high as $6 per operating hour, & Unilock was replacing two to three transmissions per year on some forklifts.

For an operation that critically depends on forklifts to keep product & customer orders moving, Unilock needed a more reliable & cost-effective solution.

FINDING A FORKLIFT BUILT FOR THE JOB

When Unilock began looking for a better option, Harn evaluated several forklift manufacturers,

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Unilock relies on the Linde H45 to load & unload up to 75 outbound trucks a day.

including Hyundai, Toyota, Caterpillar & Linde.

The goal wasn't simply to find another forklift. Unilock needed equipment that could stand up to its demanding environment while also providing better comfort for operators spending long hours behind the wheel.

"We looked at several different forklifts," Harn said. "It basically came down to what is going to give the most comfort for our employees & what is going to be the most durable for our workforce."

One major difference was Linde's hydrostatic drive system.

Unilock operators constantly stop, start & position heavy bundles while loading trucks & moving product throughout the yard. With its previous forklift fleet, that workload contributed to frequent transmission repairs.

Linde's hydrostatic drive gave operators smoother, more precise control without a conventional transmission. Harn said the added control also helped reduce product damage while positioning loads.

Unilock started with several Linde H35 & H50 forklifts. As the trucks proved themselves, the company phased out its Caterpillar fleet.

Today, the Aurora operation has more than 50 Linde forklifts, & Unilock has standardized on Linde across its North American operations.

BUILDING THE RIGHT FLEET WITH WOLTER

Wolter works closely with Harn & Yard Supervisor Julio Mondujano to match each forklift to Unilock's applications. Scott Swakow, Wolter Senior Account Manager, works directly with the team to understand its operation & recommend equipment & configurations.

That includes evaluating load capacities, reach requirements, attachments, lighting, visibility & operator comfort.

Wolter also helped Unilock avoid paying for capacity it didn't need. After reviewing the



Unilock's fleet of over 50 Linde forklifts ranges from the H15 to the H50 to handle a variety of tasks from narrow aisle to mold changes to truck loading & unloading.

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company's heaviest loads, Scott recommended moving some applications from the Linde H50 to the H45. The H45 could handle the required loads at a lower equipment cost. With the addition of the H15 for narrow spaces & several H25's & H35's, the Unilock facility now runs at optimal efficiency.

Operator comfort was also a priority. Some Unilock operators spend up to 12 hours a day in their forklifts, so the company worked with Wolter to add air conditioning, sunshades, upgraded lighting, ergonomic seating & fingertip controls.

"I've been driving a forklift for almost 30 years, & the Linde is my number one so far," said Unilock operator Willie Sosa. "The controls make it easier. I can work without having to look at them. The seat is very comfortable."

LOWER MAINTENANCE COSTS & LONGER EQUIPMENT LIFE

Unilock has seen measurable improvements in operating costs.

"We spent $6 per hour on a Caterpillar at the time, & currently we're spending anywhere from $2 - $3.50 per hour on the Lindes," Harn said.

Equipment life has improved as well.

Unilock previously expected approximately 10,000 operating hours & 4 years of service from its Caterpillar forklifts. With Linde, the company targets approximately 15,000 operating hours & 5-7 years of service. Some Linde trucks have reached 18,000 to 20,000 hours.

Wolter also helps Unilock track maintenance & determine whether issues are related to normal wear, operator use or warranty concerns. By upgrading the oil used in the trucks, Unilock extended its oil-change interval from 500 to 1,000 hours.

"If there is a mechanical problem, when I call Wolter, they get here as soon as they can, & you know they're going to fix everything correctly," Mondujano said.

MAKING MORE ROOM IN A 37-ACRE YARD

With approximately 7 million square feet of inventory in the Aurora yard, space matters.

The tight turning radius & compact design of the Linde H50's & H45's allow operators to maneuver through tight areas & make clean product picks without wider aisles. Unilock maintains approximately 48 inches between inventory rows, helping maximize storage within the existing footprint.

Harn estimates the tighter configuration allows Unilock to use roughly 45,000 square feet of inventory capacity that could otherwise be lost to wider aisles.

"From an operational viewpoint, the Linde gives you a tight-fit, streamlined forklift that gets into tighter spaces than other ones that we've tested," Harn said.



Scott Swakow (Wolter - Account Manager) works with Junior Bernal (Unilock - Forklift Operator) to highlight the operator comfort features in the Linde forklift.

KEEPING OPERATORS COMFORTABLE & SAFE

Maneuverability, visibility & load control are critical in Unilock's busy yard.

Forklifts move between production & storage while employees perform inventory counts, trucks are loaded & customers access parts of the yard. Some work also takes place at night.

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Linde's overhead tilt cylinder design helps support & stabilize the mast while handling loads. It also allows for slimmer mast profiles, improving the operator's view of the load & surrounding area.

That stability & visibility work with Linde's hydrostatic drive to give operators more precise control when handling heavy hardscape products. Upgraded lighting improves visibility during nighttime operation.

"When I'm driving with a heavy load, I feel the truck is stable, so I feel safe inside the truck," said operator Junior Bernal.

For Yard Supervisor Julio Mondujano, safety remains a priority.

"We use the forklift for everything; to pull the lines, load the trucks, move material, to do anything," he said. "But the most important thing is our safety."

A PARTNERSHIP BUILT FOR THE LONG HAUL

What began with a few Linde forklifts more than 25 years ago has grown into a long-standing relationship between Unilock, Linde & Wolter.

Wolter continues to work with Unilock on equipment specifications, fleet costs, maintenance & service. Scott Swakow, Senior Account Manager at Wolter, serves as a direct point of contact for Harn, Mondujano & the Unilock team, helping address concerns, evaluate equipment needs & improve the fleet.

"Our rep, Scott Swakow, he does it all. He's here at a moment's notice," Harn said. "Our relationship with Wolter & Scott has been really good. It's a partnership. He works closely with our yard supervisor. Sometimes I'm not even a part of it. Julio has his contact information, & they have a great working relationship as far as dealing through any concerns or anything that comes up."

For Unilock, the result is a forklift fleet built to keep millions of square feet of product moving reliably.

"I would highly recommend Linde Trucks to anyone," Harn said. "And if someone was looking for a new supplier, I would recommend Wolter."



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