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Forklift accessory could spread globally for Ikea

LOENEN, Netherlands

Thursday, 18 January 2007

Blanken Controls BV has shipped 140 Shockswitch units to BT, of Mjölby, Sweden, for installation on BT forklifts in all Swedish furniture retailer Ikea's global stores.

Shockswitch is a vehicle-mounted device that sounds an alarm when the vehicle is bumped beyond a pre-set impact level.

Blanken Controls' Shockswitch regional director Peter van Buren said 125 new BT forklifts manufactured for Ikea had already been equipped with Shockswitch.

"The number will surely increase because Ikea is opening a new 300,000 square metre European distribution centre in Germany," van Buren said. He expected about 400 new forklifts at the centre would have ShockSwitch fitted.

After 2-1/2 years of talks with Ikea's Swedish headquarters, Blanken Controls signed an agreement for supply of the Shockswitch product. While Ikea management will encourage use of the product, Ikea logistic managers decide whether they want Shockswitch installed on forklifts. As part of the agreement, Blanken signed a contract last September with BT, Ikea's global materials handling equipment supplier, to have Shockswitch installed during forklift production.

Blanken will supply Ikea with software and training to use Shockswitch.

Van Buren approached Ikea's Swedish headquarters after Blanken's US representatives sold several Shockswitch units to Ikea in the US in 2002. Over the past five years, more than 500 units have been sold to Ikea. Van Buren said the Ikea agreement could generate many Shockswitch sales for the company.

"We're happy if we get 50 per cent of Ikea's new equipment installed with Shockswitch, but that is not realistic.

"Quite a percentage of their [new] forklifts are non-motorised forklifts. Shockswitch is installed on reach trucks, stackers and counterbalanced trucks."

Shockswitch has features that prevent unauthorised use and enable safety checks. It monitors driver behaviour through capturing data on all aspects of a forklift's operation.

Shockswitch costs about EUR1,000 (USD1,294.80) per unit, including installation and modification. The software costs about EUR500 (USD647.40). Van Buren said Shockswitch's name was being changed to ImpactManager, to better reflect its function.

Blanken Controls, established in 1976, in Loenen, the Netherlands, manufactures Shockswitch in Texas, USA.

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Peter van Buren from Shockswitch and Mats Nilsson from BT after signing their contract.

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