

A man wearing a light-colored hat and work clothes is smiling while using a tool on a construction site. The background shows a large pile of gravel or sand.

# manual handling regulations

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Figures from the HSE show that manual handling is one of the most common causes of injury at work. Nearly 4,900 major injuries and 50,077 “over 3 days” injuries were reported to the enforcing authorities during 2004 to 2005 as being caused by manual handling. This represents 42% of all reported work related injuries.

These figures do not take into account the vast number of matters that go unreported.

The HSE estimates that 7 million working days were lost in 2004/5 due to workplace injury.

In light of the above this leaflet has been produced to assist you in reducing the risks of manual handling at your place of employment.

## **TYPES OF INJURY**

Moving, lifting or carrying loads can frequently cause or exacerbate injuries in the upper part of the body. This includes damage to the back, repetitive strain injury and muscular skeletal disorders. These types of injuries can occur suddenly or can develop over a period of time with strained joints, tendons, and muscles gradually becoming more painful. These injuries can develop in any workplace where heavy loads, poor lifting techniques and repetitive handling activities are performed.

Symptoms from manual handling injuries can vary from mild aches and pains to severe swelling and inflammation which can lead to a person not being able to carry on their normal life.

## **LEGAL REQUIREMENTS**

The Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 (as amended by the Health & Safety (miscellaneous amendments) Regulations 2002) were specifically brought in to spell out the duties of an employer. The employer is under a duty to reduce the risk of injury caused by manual handling activities.

The regulations make it clear that in an ideal world the best way of reducing injury is to avoid lifting altogether and if that is not possible to reduce it to the lowest practicable level. An example of how this can be achieved is by the introduction of mechanical equipment such as lifts or conveyor belts and the redesigning of the workplace.

If manual handling cannot be avoided then a risk assessment should always be carried out.

The regulations apply to all manual-handling situations.

Injuries are caused not only by heavy loads but can be caused by relatively light objects if the activity is carried out frequently or is carried out in an awkward way.

**The golden rule** should be to fit the job to the person and not the person to the job. Unfortunately all too often this does not happen.

### **1. Risk Assessments**

The risk assessment should look at all the hazards in the workplace. The risk assessment should not just take into account the task that has been undertaken but should also take into account the load being moved, the environment in which the lifting operation is being performed and the individuals' own capabilities.

The regulations do not set out to specify a weight limit that individuals should be expected to lift.

### **2. Avoiding Handling**

Employers should give priority to minimising the risk of injury by finding alternative ways of carrying out manual handling activities.

Jobs should be redesigned so that the need for excessive lifting is reduced.

Mechanical and automated aids should be introduced wherever possible, such as trolleys, mechanical assistors and portable conveyors to move materials around. These can range from the simple lifting hook, to trucks, trolleys, lift-truck and conveyors.

**N B** The Lifting Operation Regulations 1998 require employers to carry out a risk assessment of the lifting operation. This includes the selection and use of lifting equipment and the training of staff that operate it. The regulations also require that lifting equipment should be sufficiently strong and stable for its proposed use.

### **3. Adapting the Workplace**

Employers should be asked to look at how and why particular manual handling tasks are carried out. The layout of the workplace should be altered to reduce the risk of injury. An easy

example of this is to ensure that loads are at the correct height for handling. In addition the pattern of work can be altered. If a task involves the repeated handling of a load (no matter what the weight) the activity should be broken up with rest periods and different activities.

## **ASSESSING THE RISK IN DETAIL**

- 1.** An ideal risk assessment should identify the full range of handling operations that are undertaken, including any task that involves lifting, carrying, pushing or pulling and should identify the risk that the manual handling creates and the measures needed to reduce that risk.
- 2.** The assessment should be carried out by someone who has been trained to observe and appreciate manual handling activities. This means that medium or high-risk environments may require specialist advice.
- 3.** The amount of detail required by a risk assessment is dependent upon the task being carried out.
- 4.** Accident records should be examined to see where problems already exist and checklists should be used to ensure that all hazards have been considered.

## **ITEMS TO BE ASSESSED**

Any assessment should cover 4 main areas - the task, the load, the working environment and the individuals' handling capability.

### **The Task**

- Does the job involve repetitive movement or insufficient rest times?
- Does the task involve twisting stooping or reaching upwards?
- Does the task involve a risk of a sudden movement of the load?
- Does the task involve holding loads away from the body, long carrying distances or strenuous pushing or pulling?
- Does the task require any unusual strength or height?

## **The load**

The load should be looked at to consider whether it is possible to change its size, shape, weight or form so that it is easier to move or handle.

The load should be looked at to consider whether or not it is difficult to grasp, whether it is stable and whether it is sharp or hot.

## **Working Environment**

This can have a bearing on someone carrying out a manual-handling task. Factors that should be considered are as follows.

- Is the workplace floor uneven or slippery?
- Are there space constraints to prevent good posture?
- Are there variations in floor levels or work surfaces e.g. steps or steep slopes?
- Working conditions such as weather making it difficult to lift and carry loads
- Is the lighting adequate?

## **Physical Capabilities**

The physical capabilities of the individual must be considered. In particular it should be borne in mind that an allowance must be made for pregnant workers or those with health problems and a particular job may impose unusual demands on the employee.

Individuals lifting capacity varies with age. Risks are therefore increased for younger and older employees.

Consideration must also be given to the individuals knowledge & training as well as to the clothing, footwear or other effects he/she is wearing

In some handling operations it is necessary for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to be provided to ensure the risk of injury is kept as low as possible. The surface of the load should be checked to ensure it does not cut, scratch or burn the person handling it.

## **TRAINING**

Once the risk assessment is complete steps must be taken to reduce the risk of injury. The most effective step is training. Training should include:

- How to recognise hazardous manual handling
- How to deal with unfamiliar handling operations
- How to use handling and lifting aids
- How to use PPE
- How to assess your own capability and limitations
- How to utilise good handling techniques

Workers should be trained to recognise loads that are unusual in weight, shape or other feature. Where practicable to do so they should be given precise information on:

- The weight of each load
- The heaviest side of any load whose centre of gravity is not positioned centrally

Workers and their safety representatives should be involved in developing and implementing manual handling training.

## **GUIDANCE ON LIFTING**

### **Preparing for a Lift**

Employers should make sure that all workers have been properly trained and follow certain lifting guidelines. This includes:

#### **1. Examining the load**

Determine the weight of the object to be lifted and check it is stable. Weights that are heavy and awkward should be marked. If the weight is too heavy then assistance should be sought.

## 2. Planning the job

The route should be planned as straight as possible and it should be ensured that it is free from slipping and trapping hazards. Where possible, doors should be wedged open to avoid having to put loads down or manoeuvre awkwardly through them.

3. Workers should also look for places to stop and rest along the way and make sure that the unloading area is clear.
4. Having a firm grip - workers should be trained to look in advance to decide how to hold an object and consider whether they need to wear any kind of PPE such as gloves or overalls.

## Lifting and Carrying a load

When picking up a load from a low level, workers should always bend their knees rather than their back. The back should be kept straight at all times. Before lifting the load the worker should lean forward slightly over the load to get a good grip. In addition shoulders should be kept level and should face in the same direction as the hips.

Feet should be placed hip width apart with one foot slightly in front.

When carrying, small slow steps should be taken. Workers should be able to see where they are going. The grip should not be altered whilst walking and the load should be kept as close to the body as possible.

The workers carrying the load should ensure their route is free of any slips or trip hazards from stairs. They should check that their footwear is suitable and ensure they can see where they are going.

## Unloading the Load

You should face the spot chosen and lower the load slowly letting the legs do the work rather than the back. Care should be taken that fingers are not trapped at the bottom.

Wherever it is not possible to get very close to the load care should be taken to still ensure that the knees are bent as much as possible, or if possible knees should be braced against a solid object. Hips should be bent keeping the head and back in a straight line and the lift should be undertaken using leg and stomach muscles. If the load is at a high level ideally a mechanical aid should be used. If that is not possible steps should be taken to:

- Lighten the load
- Stand as close to the load as possible
- Push up on the load to see how heavy it is
- Grasp the load firmly
- Slide the load as close as possible towards the body before lifting

## **Two People Lifts**

If a handling operation requires two workers the following steps should be taken:

- The two workers should be of a similar build and height
- One worker should be responsible to say when and where to move
- Both workers should lift from the hips at the same time and raise the load to the agreed level
- Both workers should ensure that they move smoothly together
- Both workers should unload at the same time

**The above is only intended as a short guide through the Manual Handling Procedure. For further information or advice please feel free to contact our office details of which can be found on the front of this guide.**

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