

MANUAL HANDLING

Manual handling injuries

More than a third of over-three-day lost-time injuries reported to the HSE are caused by manual handling.

What is manual handling?

Manual handling is the transporting or supporting of loads by hand or by bodily force, for example:

- carrying a bag of aggregates in your arms
- hand shovelling spillage from under a conveyor
- pushing a sack barrow
- bending over and lifting up an inspection cover.

Avoid the need for manual handling

- Do you need to move the load?
- Can you use mechanical means to move it? Eg a forklift truck, a sack barrow, a hoist?
- Can you get some other assistance?

Assessing the risk of injury

- Site management should ensure all routine manual handling operations have been assessed and appropriate measures taken to minimise the risk of injury to people undertaking the task.
- Are there any routine manual handling tasks that the employees feel is putting them at risk of injury?
- It is not always possible for management to assess in advance every single manual handling task that an employee has to undertake, so it is important that employees are competent to assess the risk themselves. To be able to do this they need some basic training in manual handling skills.

Have you received training in the last three years? If not, advise your manager.

When assessing the risk, think about:

- weight of the load
- size and shape of the load
- posture during manual handling
- distance you have to lift or lower the load
- nature of the manual handling movement
- frequency of the manual handling task
- working environment
- capability of the individual

All the above can affect the likelihood of injury. There are things we can do to reduce the risk and make the task safer.

Good manual handling technique

- Assess the task
- Clear the area of any obstructions
- Position feet properly
- Adopt a good posture (bend your legs not your back)
- Get a firm grip and use the right gloves
- Keep the load close to your body
- Don't jerk
- Move your feet (don't twist)

Some manual handling operations are unsafe if we attempt them on our own but if we get assistance from a colleague(s) and share the load, then the task can be done safely.

Don't take risks

If you feel a load is too heavy or the task is too awkward, STOP and re-assess the operation. Can you use mechanical aids or can you get some assistance? If after re-assessing you feel it is still not safe to proceed then DON'T, and inform your supervisor or manager. It is too late once you have been injured.

What you can do

We need everyone to play a part in:

- identifying unsafe manual handling practices
- developing safe ways of doing the tasks
- providing mechanical aids where it is justified to do so
- agreeing with and following safe work practices.

Following the four steps above will help make your workplace safer and reduce the risk of your being injured by manual handling.

Over the next week or so when you carry out a manual handling task, ask yourself: Is this really safe? How can it be done more safely? Where you feel there is a risk of injury, notify your supervisor or manager and work together to develop a safer way of doing the job.

Lost Time Injury incidents

1. An operative was levering the tail-end of a bagging conveyor, using a crow-bar, when he injured his back. He was absent for 16 days.
2. An employee tore a ligament in his arm while using a hand shovel to clean up spillage from under the tail-end of a radial conveyor. He was absent for eight days.
3. An operative trapped a nerve in his back whilst lifting a 15kg box of bag ties from the back of a forklift truck. He was absent for four days.
4. An operative felt a twinge in his back while removing a steel chute cover plate from beneath a screen. He was absent for one day.
5. An operative suffered a back strain injury while handling a pallet. He was absent for 13 days.
6. An operative felt a pain in the middle of his back when he tried to pick up a bag after it fell off a bag lifter. He lost nine days.
7. A technician suffered a back injury while filling a 20kg sack with 6mm crushed limestone at a stockpile. He was absent for four days.

QUESTIONS – (there may be more than one correct answer)

		A	B	C
1	Should you always attempt to move a load manually?	Yes – we always do it this way	No - always try to avoid the need for manual handling	Depends on how strong I'm feeling
2	What other options do you have?	Assistance	Fork lift truck	Try moving it tomorrow
3	Does site management assess all manual-handling tasks?	Yes	No	Routine
4	When lifting, what part of the body do you bend to take the weight?	Spine	Knees	Ankles
5	Is 25kg the maximum weight that can be lifted by an individual?	Yes	No – this is guidance	Only if the load is positioned at waist height

