

RISK BULLETIN



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MANUAL HANDLING

The Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 (amended in 2002) apply to all manual handling activities (including lifting, lowering, pushing, pulling or carrying) performed by employees whilst at work.

What's the problem?

According to the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) incorrect manual handling is one of the most common causes of injury at work. It causes work-related musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) which account for over a third of all workplace injuries.

Manual handling injuries can happen in any work place – on farms and building sites, in factories, offices, warehouses, hospitals, banks, laboratories, and while making deliveries. Heavy manual labour, awkward postures, manual materials handling, and previous or existing injuries are all risk factors in developing MSDs.



What does the law require regarding manual handling?

The Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 require employers to:

- Avoid... the need for hazardous manual handling, so far as is reasonably practicable
- Consider... does the object need to be moved? Can you mechanise or automate the process?
- Assess... the risk of injury from any hazardous manual handling that can't be avoided
- Reduce... the risk of injury from hazardous manual handling, so far as is reasonably practicable.

Where manual handling cannot be avoided, then an employer must carry out a risk assessment to determine the hazards and risks involved and what control measures are needed to reduce risk.

Assessing the Risks

– Load / Individual / Task / Environment (LITE)

Loads, are they:

- Heavy, bulky or unwieldy?
- Difficult to hold?
- Unstable or unpredictable?
- Awkwardly stacked?
- Intrinsically harmful e.g. sharp or hot?

Individual capacity, as the law does not set a specific weight limit which can be lifted safely. Does the job:

- Require unusual capability?
- Endanger those with a health problem?
- Endanger pregnant women?
- Require special information or training?

Reducing the Risks

– Load / Individual / Task / Environment (LITE)

Loads, can you make these:

- Lighter or less bulky?
- Easier to hold?
- More stable?
- Less damaging to hold?
- Can suppliers help by providing handles or smaller packages?

Individual capacity, can you:

- Take better care of those with physical weaknesses or who are pregnant?
- Provide employees with more information, e.g. about the range of tasks they are likely to face?
- Provide further training?



MANUAL HANDLING



Assessing the Risks

– Load / Individual / Task / Environment (LITE)

Tasks, do they involve:

- Holding loads away from the body?
- Twisting, reaching or stooping?
- Strenuous pushing or pulling?
- Unpredictable movement of loads?
- Large vertical movement?
- Long carrying distances?
- Repetitive handling?
- Insufficient rest time?
- A work rate imposed by the process?

Working environment, are there:

- Constraints on posture?
- Variations in floor level?
- Poor, uneven or slippery floor surfaces?
- Hot/cold/humid conditions?
- Strong air movements?
- Poor lighting?
- Restrictions on movement or posture from clothes or personal protective equipment?

Reducing the Risks

– Load / Individual / Task / Environment (LITE)

Tasks, can you:

- Reduce the amount of twisting and stooping?
- Avoid lifting from floor level or above shoulder height?
- Avoid strenuous pushing or pulling?
- Reduce carrying distances?
- Avoid repetitive handling?
- Vary work, allowing one set of muscles to rest while another is used?

Working environment, can you:

- Improve workplace layout to improve efficiency?
- Remove obstructions to free movement?
- Provide better flooring?
- Avoid steps and steep ramps?
- Prevent extremes of hot and cold?
- Improve lighting?
- Consider less restrictive clothing or personal protective equipment?

What does ‘reasonably practicable’ mean?

This means balancing the level of risk against the measures needed to control the risk in terms of money, time and trouble.

What about mechanical lifting aids?

Employers should provide mechanical aids if it is reasonably practicable to do so and the risks identified in the risk assessment can be reduced or eliminated by their use. However, employers should consider mechanical aids in other situations also – they can improve productivity as well as safety.

What about training?

Where manual handling is an integral part of someone’s job they must receive information, instruction and training. Training should cover:

- Manual handling risk factors and how injuries can occur
- How to carry out safe manual handling, including good handling technique
- Appropriate systems of work for the individual’s tasks and environment
- Use of mechanical aids
- Practical work to allow the trainer to identify and put right anything the trainee is not doing safely

What responsibilities do employees have?

Employees also have responsibilities under the regulations to:

- Follow systems of work which are in place for their safety
- Ensure they correctly use equipment that is provided for their safety
- Cooperate with their employer on health and safety matters
- Inform their employer if they identify hazardous handling activities
- Make sure their activities do not put others at risk

Key Points

- Review all manual handling tasks - avoid them where possible and mechanise whatever you can
- Remember that manual handling covers pushing and pulling as well as lifting
- There is no legal maximum weight that people can lift – it depends on their capability
- Complete Risk Assessments for all manual handling activities – Load / Individual / Task / Environment (LITE)
- Share information with employees and others
- Train employees in good manual handling practices
- Where mechanical aids are used, ensure that they are regularly maintained and serviced and have any statutory inspections e.g. for lifting aids/hoists



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