# Manual Handling in the Workplace: Management Briefing

Manual handling involves the lifting, putting down, pushing, pulling, carrying or moving of a load. This includes pulling on a rope or lever, as well as directly handling the load.

Manual handling is the biggest cause of over seven day reportable injuries to employees with more than a quarter of over seven day injuries attributable to manual handling resulting in work-related musculoskeletal disorders.

The total number of work-related musculoskeletal disorders (WRMSDs) cases in 2015/2016 was 539,000 out of a total of 1,311,000 for all work-related illnesses, 41% of the total.

An estimated8.8 million working days were lost due to WRMSDs, an average of 16 days lost for each case. This represents 40% of all days lost due to work related ill-health in 2015/2016.

## Key risk factors with poor manual handling

- Spinal injuries – the vast majority of back problems are caused by disc lesions. When upright, the back is able to withstand considerable stress directly through the length of the spine, but when the back is bent, the stress is concentrated at one point
- Hernias – when the body is in a bent position the risk of hernia is increased
- Cuts, abrasions and fractures, including; failing to check for sharp edges or nails when picking up a load, tripping over objects left lying around and, not wearing the correct protective clothing.

## Recommendations for employers

- Assess the manual handling activity in detail
- Reduce the need for manual handling in the workplace, either by eliminating completely, or by use of work equipment such as conveyors or fork lift trucks
- If manual handling cannot be avoided then minimise the dangers by using trolleys, trucks or similar equipment
- Train employees in good and safe manual handling techniques
- Supply suitable information on the load to be lifted
- Provide the right equipment to handle the load safely.

## Case Law

A Warwickshire bathroom company was been prosecuted after a worker suffered crush injuries when unloading items from a delivery vehicle. Two workers were involved – one passing boxes from the vehicle down to the other who was standing on the ground. The boxes were between 25 and 50 kg each and were sat on a shrink wrapped pallet on the vehicle. The driver cut away the shrink wrap on one pallet and several items fell out onto the worker below. He went to hospital and had a month off with damaged ligaments in his wrist.

The company was found guilty of failing to conduct a risk assessment, provide training and use a safe system of work. It was fined £4,000 and ordered to pay costs of £2,500.

It has subsequently introduced a safe system of work using a vehicle with a tail lift and also ensuring that all palletised goods are moved by a fork lift truck. Manual handling training has also been conducted with all staff.

Civil liability claims for manual handling injuries can result in particularly large payouts with the more serious cases reaching six figure liability claims.

## Summary

- **Avoid** manual handling operations where possible
- **Assess** the risks of any unavoidable hazardous operations
- **Eliminate** or control the risk of injury, using an assessment as a basis for action.

**"Ensure that a risk assessment is always carried out when manual handling"**

## Legal duties

Manual handling is covered by two main pieces of legislation:

- The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 places a general duty for employers to conduct a suitable and sufficient assessment of the risks to the health and safety of their employees while at work
- The Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 (as amended) contain more specific duties in terms of manual handling including specific risk assessment and training provisions.

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