

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 single cause of over-seven-day reportable injuries to employees. An estimated 439,000 people in Britain suffer from work-related musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), including those caused by manual handling, which account for around a third of all work-related ill health. An estimated 7.5 million working days were lost in 2011/12 as a result of MSDs.

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.

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

Case Law

Research carried out for the HSE in 2003 revealed that the average cost of settling a compensation claim following a manual handling accident is £4,325.

One manufacturing company installed a range of fencing products and had a small shed at their site where concrete posts and lintels were made. These ranged in weight from a few kgs to over 200 kgs when dry. The casting process included a number of operations that warranted a manual handling assessment but no assessment was carried out.

All of the products were lifted manually and no measures were taken to reduce the risk of injury. It was estimated that the largest blocks would have weighed approximately 265 kg. The company was fined £1,000 with additional costs of £2,210 for breaches of the Manual Handling Operations Regulations.

Following intervention by HSE, the company installed roller tables that significantly reduced the amount of manual handling by employees. Manual handling training has also been provided for employees and lifting charts are displayed.

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.

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.

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