Correct risk management process for manual handling

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We want to find out more about who uses this part of our website and what they think of it. You can help us by completing a short survey. Go to survey Manual handling causes over a third of all workplace injuries. These include work-related musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) such as pain and injuries to arms, legs and joints, and repetitive strain injuries of various sorts. The term manual handling covers a wide variety of activities including lifting, lowering, pushing, pulling and carrying. If any of these tasks are not carried out appropriately there is a risk of injury. A manufacturing company kept bulk chemicals stored in heavy tubs at floor or shoulder height. This meant that the operators were continually reaching down or up, both of which increase the risk of injury. The solution To address the risk, the company drew up guidelines on the storage of heavy loads to ensure they are now stored at waist height, which makes lifting and handling easier. Why is dealing with manual handling important? Manual handling injuries can have serious implications for the employer and the person who has been injured. They can occur almost anywhere in the workplace and heavy manual labour, awkward postures, repetitive movements of arms, legs and back or previous/existing injury can increase the risk. What do I have to do? To help prevent manual handling injuries in the workplace, you should avoid such tasks as far as possible. However, where it is not possible to avoid handling a load, employers must look at the risks of that task and put sensible health and safety measures in place to prevent and avoid injury. For any lifting activity Always take into account: individual capability the nature of the load environmental conditions training work organisation If you need to lift something manually Reduce the amount of twisting, stooping and reaching Avoid lifting from floor level or above shoulder height, especially heavy loads Adjust storage areas to minimise the need to carry out such movements Consider how you can minimise carrying distances Assess the weight to be carried and whether the worker can move the load safely or needs any help – maybe the load can be broken down to smaller, lighter components If you need to use lifting equipment Consider whether you can use a lifting aid, such as a forklift truck, electric or hand-powered hoist, or a conveyor Think about storage as part of the delivery process – maybe heavy items could be delivered directly, or closer, to the storage area Reduce carrying distances where possible A wholesale plant nursery dealt with very large plants and trees in pots. The plants were heavy, bulky and of varied sizes and shapes. Workers had reported severe back strain when handling these plants. The solution The company sourced a specialised barrow, which was adjustable to allow for moving different-shaped, large plants. The new barrow means just one person (rather than two) is needed to transport plants and workers report there is no longer a back strain issue. Good handling technique for lifting There are some simple things to do before and during the lift/carry: Remove obstructions from the route. For a long lift, plan to rest the load midway on a table or bench to change grip. Keep the load close to the waist. The load should be kept close to the body for as long as possible while lifting. Keep the heaviest side of the load next to the body. Adopt a stable position and make sure your feet are apart, with one leg slightly forward to maintain balance Think before lifting/handling. Plan the lift. Can handling aids be used? Where is the load going to be placed? Will help be needed with the load? Remove obstructions such as discarded wrapping materials. For a long lift, consider resting the load midway on a table or bench to change grip. Adopt a stable position. The feet should be apart with one leg slightly forward to maintain balance (alongside the load, if it is on the ground). Be prepared to move your feet during the lift to maintain your stability. Avoid tight clothing or unsuitable footwear, which may make this difficult. Get a good hold. Where possible, the load should be hugged as close as possible to the body. This may be better than gripping it tightly with hands only. Start in a good posture. At the start of the lift, slight bending of the back, hips and knees is preferable to fully flexing the back (stooping) or fully flexing the hips and knees (squatting). Don't flex the back any further while lifting. This can happen if the legs begin to straighten before starting to raise the load. Keep the load close to the waist. Keep the load close to the body for as long as possible while lifting. Keep the heaviest side of the load next to the body. If a close approach to the load is not possible, try to slide it towards the body before attempting to lift it. Avoid twisting the back or leaning sideways, especially while the back is bent. Shoulders should be kept level and facing in the same direction as the hips. Turning by moving the feet is better than twisting and lifting at the same time. Keep the head up when handling. Look ahead, not down at the load, once it has been held securely. Move smoothly. The load should not be jerked or snatched as this can make it harder to keep control and can increase the risk of injury. Don't lift or handle more than can be easily managed. There is a difference between what people can lift and what they can safely lift. If in doubt, seek advice or get help. Put down, then adjust. If precise positioning of the load is necessary, put it down first, then slide it into the desired position. Find out more HSE's musculoskeletal disorders website The Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 (as amended) apply to work which involves lifting, lowering, pushing, pulling or carrying. Manual handling activities are an essential part of many workflows, but they can also be extremely dangerous if they are not managed correctly by everyone involved in the process. The lifting and carrying of heavy objects can seem straightforward enough on paper, but in reality there are all sorts of things that can go wrong, potentially resulting in serious injury and possible legal consequences, not to mention damage to valuable goods. This is why any company responsible for manual handling needs to make sure it carries out a thorough risk assessment before any such activity can take place. In doing so, bosses can weigh up all the potential hazards and take steps to mitigate them, ensuring that the whole process can proceed smoothly and safely. The Law Because the Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 specify that it the business owner’s responsibility to ensure that adequate safeguards are in place - and mandate that you do everything you can to reduce the risk of manual handling accidents - injuries related to lifting or carrying heavy loads can also open your business up to potential lawsuits and fines, which can be exorbitant. In 2017, an engineering firm was fined £20,000 after one of their workers was injured while carrying a heavy steel frame, and while most manual handling accidents don’t result in legal action, it’s always worth taking steps to safeguard your business from similar lawsuits. Looking for a breakdown of the current legislation? Click here to read our legislation guide. The risks of manual handling Manual handling involves lifting, carrying, lowering or otherwise moving a load by hand or bodily force and is known to be the most common cause of accidental injury in the workplace. One in three accidents at work are caused by manual handling, with around 300,000 people in the UK suffering from back pain due to manual handling accidents each year. Given that 12.3 million working days are lost annually due to work-related musculoskeletal disorders, it should be clear why preventing manual handling accidents is crucially important from both a safety and a financial perspective. Factors to consider When carrying out a manual handling risk assessment, staff should be considering four main areas: the nature of the task, the capabilities of the individual performing it, the characteristics of the load and the layout of the environment. These four factors can be easily remembered by using the acronym TILE. Task Assessing the task this step should involve an examination of what the manual handling process involves on a basic logistical level, including the positioning of the load, the distance that needs to be travelled and the number of people needed to carry it out. In particular, consideration should be given to whether the lifter will need to stoop down or twist at the waste at any point, as well as making sure that those involved will have adequate opportunity to rest and recover. Individual This step requires bosses to think about the personal capabilities of those involved in the work, including their age, preexisting health conditions, the equipment they possess and whether or not they require specialist training. Some tasks may require a person with a specific level of strength, while others may not be suitable for certain individuals due to prior injuries they may have sustained. Load Some loads are more difficult to transport than others for reasons that go beyond whether or not they are heavy. As such, it's worth taking the time to think about whether the object in question has an unwieldy shape, whether it is difficult to grasp, whether it obscures the carrier's view when they hold it or whether its contents are likely to shift around during transit, which can affect balance. Environment The environment can also play a role in making a manual handling task more difficult. This is especially the case if space is restricted, if the ground is uneven or slippery, if the lighting or ventilation is poor, and if the environment is exposed to weather and the elements. As such, taking these factors into account should also be a key part of the risk assessment process. Basic principles to consider Although the solutions to each of these problems will vary from case to case, there are a few basic principles that can help staff to make sure they are handling heavy loads as safely as possible. These include clearing a path and a setting-down point before the moving begins, bending the knees to lift without curving the back and grasping the object as close to the body as possible. Workers should also be advised to avoid twisting the body as much as possible by turning their feet to position themselves and to make sure that one person is responsible for coordinating collective action when lifting as a team. Companies should also bear in mind the need to invest in handling aids such as trolleys or wheelbarrows in certain circumstances and to utilise personal protective equipment. Above all else, it's vital to take an ergonomic approach that adapts procedure according to the results of the risk assessment, rather than trying to apply a one-size-fits-all approach that doesn't account for different circumstances. Summary: When managing manual handling activities in the workplace, it is essential that managers remember the key principles that will allow them to effectively assess and deal with any risks that might arise. Sources www.ncl.ac.uk www.unison.org.uk www.healthyworkinglives.com Related resources

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