SEGMENT FOURTEEN – Manual Handling

After studying this segment you should have a greater understanding of the risks associated with manual handling.

AIMS OF THE SEGMENT

The main aim of this segment is to help you to appreciate the risks associated with manual handling and be able to:

- Outline the responsibilities of the employer and the employee under the Manual Handling Operations Regulations;
- Give examples of manual handling injuries;
- State the need to minimise manual handling where possible and for manual handling activities to be properly assessed;
- Describe methods to reduce the risk of injury from manual handling including correct lifting techniques and the use of mechanical aids.

INTRODUCTION

Almost all workplaces involve some form of manual handling and almost all employees at some time or other have to move, lift, push, twist or pull a load.

More than 25% of all reportable accidents at work appear to involve some form of manual handling operation.

Injuries from poor manual handling can be some of the hardest to recover from.

MANUAL HANDLING OPERATIONS REGULATIONS

EMPLOYER RESPONSIBILITIES

The responsibilities of employers are very clear and simple, and they follow the usual hierarchy of control that we have seen throughout this module.

- Avoid manual handling where there is any potential risk to employees:

- Where it is not reasonably practicable[5] to avoid manual handling employers must:
    - Risk assess the activity;
    - Take action to reduce the risks to the minimum practicable level.

AVOID – ASSESS - REDUCE

EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITIES

As an employee, your responsibilities are equally simple.

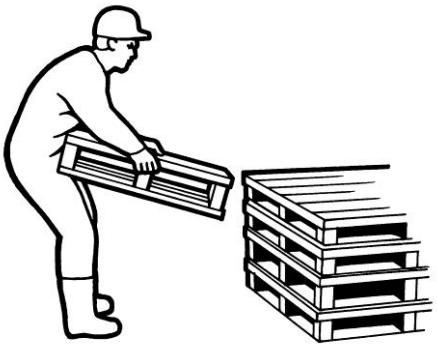
They are:

- To work with and cooperate with your employer on all H&S matters;
- To follow the guidance or safe systems of work provided by your employer;
- Use equipment correctly and lift and handle loads safely.
- Bring any risks to the attention of a responsible person;
- To not put others at risk through your activities.

MANUAL HANDLING INJURIES

Manual handling causes more injuries than any other single activity in the workplace. Typical manual handling injuries include:

- Spinal disc injuries such as a prolapsed or slipped disc;
- Muscle strains;
- Tendon sprains;
- Bruises and damage;
- Crush injuries;
- Broken bones;
- Hernias;



Most of these injuries are caused by using the wrong lifting and handling methods, working beyond your capabilities or through some unforeseen event.

Manual handling injuries are more likely to occur when either:

- Manual handling is a major part of your work – simple repetition will make injury more likely over time:

- You rarely lift and handle loads – lack of experience being the likely cause;

[5] This is the balance between the cost of avoiding injuries and the consequences if you do not avoid them

There are two ways to avoid manual handling injuries. The simplest is not to lift or move a load, but of course always avoiding manual handling is something that most of us cannot manage to get away with. The other way to avoid problems is to do it right.

If you have to lift and move a load then you can reduce the risk of injury by:

- Using the appropriate equipment or technique;
- Using appropriate PPE;
- Working within your limits;
- Getting help – two man lift;
- Taking other appropriate precautions.

To do this you need to pay close attention to what you do and this is why you and your employer needs to carry out risk assessments specifically for manual handling.

An appropriate manual handling risk assessment will tell you what the risks are, what the control measures are and if followed will reduce the risk of injury.

Oh, and they are also required by LAW.

Don't expect to find a written risk assessment for every possible manual handling operation in your workplace. But it is reasonable to find one for every operation that poses a significant risk or which requires the operation to be carried out in a particular way.

When assessing manual handling tasks use **LITE (**or **TILE**) as a memory jogger.

L – Load * **I** – Individual * **T** – Task * **E** – Environment

MANUAL HANDLING RISK ASSESSMENTS

Manual handling risk assessments follow the same general approach outlined in the Risk Assessment Segment earlier in this pack.

There are a few peculiarities about Manual Handling Risk Assessments.

For example, the risk varies much more from individual to individual. Larger, stronger individuals are less at risk from some handling operations than smaller and weaker individuals, and the risk assessments must take this into account.

The starting point for these types of Risk Assessment is a Task Analysis – an examination of what is done as part of the job. Let's use **LITE** as our method.

LOAD – what is the load, what does it weigh, is it hard to grasp

or will the balance shift?

INDIVIDUAL – who is to do this? Do they need training, unusual strength or height?

TASK – what is being done and how? – too much bending, twisting, lifting too high are all details of the Task that need to be considered.

ENVIRONMENT - Where will the activity be carried out? Is the floor slippery, is the area cramped, poorly lit, cold or untidy?

If an assessment is necessary then it is your employer's responsibility to carry it out. There is though a role that you can play in this assessment, above and beyond the need to cooperate.

As an employee you can help carry out the assessment – after all, you will often know what problems there are and how best to solve them.

If your work is varied or not closely supervised, then you need to make sure you are aware what risks to look for when manual handling, and what to do about them.

If your employer is planning to buy new handling equipment then why not get involved in the selection process – after all you will be one of the ones who has to use it.

USE OF MECHANICAL AIDS

Mechanical aids can be simple or complex. One of the simplest in the seafood industry is the hook used by market porters to drag boxes of fish across a market floor. One of the most complex is the automated warehousing systems that move goods in and out of storage at the flick of a switch.

Most of us will be likely to use something in between these two extremes.

Examples of mechanical aids are:

- Pedestrian operated powered pallet trucks
- Hand operated pallet trucks;
- Fork lift trucks;
- Trolleys etc.
- Cranes, 'Cherry Pickers' and other high lift equipment;
- Hoists of various forms;
- Tables that adjust in height;

- Conveyors and chutes.

Of all these must be fit for purpose and properly maintained. Some of the more complex equipment is regulated by the LOLER Regs or Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations .

These Regulations cover any equipment used at work for lifting or lowering loads, including attachments used for anchoring, fixing or supporting it.

The Regulations cover a wide range of equipment including, cranes, fork-lift trucks, lifts, hoists, mobile elevating work platforms, and vehicle inspection platform hoists.

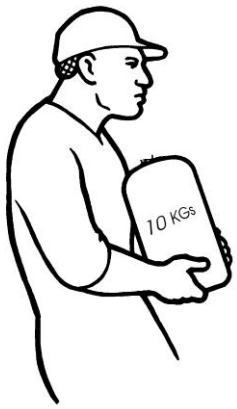
The definition also includes lifting accessories such as chains, slings, eyebolts etc.

SIMPLE LIFTING AND CARRYING TECHNIQUES

Demonstrating safe lifting and handling is not a suitable subject for an open learning module such as this. To train someone to lift correctly you need to be face to face with an expert trainer.

However, so that you have a better understanding of the theory behind safe lifting and handling, here are the key points:

1. Assess the load – push it, twist it, get a feel for how heavy and awkward it is;
2. Feet position – point in the direction you want to move so that you do not have to lift and twist;
3. Relax;
4. Bend knees – Curtsey, don't Bow
5. Get a good grip;
6. Deep breath;
7. Chin up, and lift using your leg muscles;
8. Keep the load close to your body;
9. Walk forward, don't twist.



Putting down the load is the reverse of lifting using your legs, and keeping your chin up.

Before we finish we must consider the load. There is detailed guidance as to what loads can be lifted and carried and the guide weights vary for men and women, and depend on where and how you hold the load. (see Summary to this segment)

If you need to know this information then consult the HSE Guide. (INDG143)

I suggest that you look to reduce the weight of those loads that individuals are expected to carry to the lowest possible.

Several years ago a fish processing company decided to reduce the weight of the

bags of sauce mix their workers carried, so that women could work in the sauce mixing department.

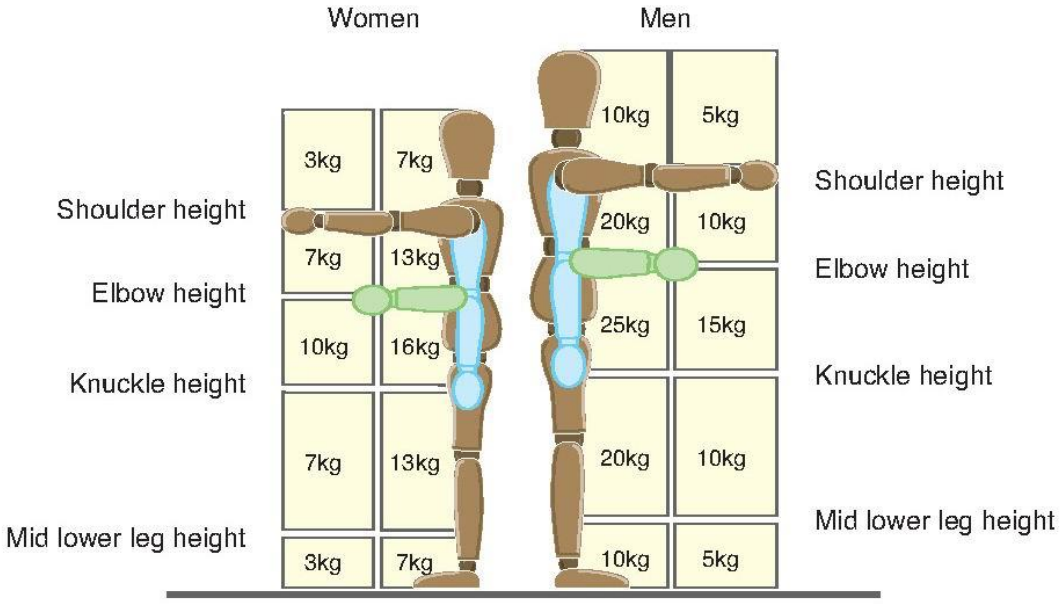
An unexpected benefit was a reduction in sickness absence from the men working in that department. They hadn't complained about the weight of the heavier bags, but they appreciated the lighter bags and suffered less because of them.

SUMMARY

Can you (the employer) or you (the employee) make manual handling safer by:

- use a lifting aid?
- improve workplace layout to improve efficiency?
- reduce the amount of twisting and stooping?
- avoid lifting from floor level or above shoulder height, especially heavy loads?
- reduce carrying distances?
- avoid repetitive handling?
- vary the work, allowing one set of muscles to rest while another is used?
- push rather than pull?
- remove obstructions to free movement?
- provide better flooring?
- avoid steps and steep ramps?
- prevent extremes of hot and cold?
- improve lighting?
- provide protective clothing or PPE that is less restrictive?
- ensure your employees' clothing and footwear is suitable for their work?
- can you make the load:
    - lighter or less bulky?
    - easier to grasp?
    - more stable?
    - less damaging to hold?
- pay particular attention to those who have a physical weakness?
- take extra care of pregnant workers?
- give your employees more information, eg about the range of tasks they are likely to face?
- provide more training;
- get advice from an occupational health advisor if you need to
- handling aids and equipment:
- is the device the correct type for the job?
- is it well maintained?
- are the wheels on the device suited to the floor surface?
- do the wheels run freely?
- is the handle height between the waist and shoulders?
- are the handle grips in good order and comfortable?
- are there any brakes? If so, do they work?

- Work within these guidelines?



These are just some of the suggestions available from the HSE booklet INDG143 *Getting to Grips with Manual Handling*, available free from HSE Books

