

BFAWU GUIDE TO MANUAL HANDLING

In excess of 30% of all workplace injuries reported to the HSE each year are directly attributable to manual handling. These injuries are caused by excessive, lifting, carrying, pulling, pushing or holding of loads.

Manual handling induced injuries mostly affect the back, but can also cause severe problems to the limbs, muscles, tendons and the heart and because these injuries tend to take longer to heal they have a more profound effect on the longer-term health of the injured party.

Manual handling injuries are not a failure of the weak person, but a failure of the control measures put in place.

Some actions carry greater risk for example:

- Lifting from the floor.
- Lifting above head height.
- Moving items with arms away from the body.
- Working in cold, hot, greasy, humid environments.
- Repetitive lifting and carrying.
- Twisting and awkward body posture.
- Handling loads that are awkward or difficult to hold.
- Working on uneven surfaces.

These problems can be identified by risk assessing the movement and control measures put in place. We should not be asking, "How we lift, but do we need to lift?"

The risk assessment should look at:

- The movements and effort needed to carry out the task.
- The individual capabilities of the operative.
- The environment.
- Recovery period allowed.
- Any other relevant factors.
- Are the movements unavoidable?

A person who has a thorough knowledge of all aspects of Manual Handling should carry out the risk assessment.

The control measures should include:

- Mechanical aids.
- Improving the tasks.
- Job rotation.
- Redesign of the workstation.
- Smaller, more manageable loads.
- Improved manual handling training.

Our safety representatives are trained to identify Manual Handling hotspots, to evaluate risk assessments and to participate in the control measures needed to eradicate the problems.

Special attention should be paid to those most at risk of manual handling injuries:

- The young, who may not have fully developed or who are inexperienced in the working procedures.
- Pregnant Women
- People recovering from a previous manual handling injury.
- People recovering from or presently experiencing an illness.
- Workers returning from holiday or lengthy period of absence.
- Those not used to manual work
- And unfit, over-weight people.

Remember, new working practices should design manual handling out.