

A quick-read guide to your obligations over manual handling

# Manual Handling

## know it all



Over a quarter of all reportable injuries in the work place are caused by manual handling, and the HSE has estimates that an average of 11 working days per sufferer were lost through musculoskeletal disorders affecting the back, caused by manual handling injuries.

Manual handling is defined as the transporting or supporting of loads by hand or by bodily force, and under the Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 (amended in 2002), employers must avoid the need for hazardous manual handling, so far as is reasonably practicable; assess the risk of injury from manual handling which can't be avoided; and reduce this risk of injury from hazardous manual handling.

### AVOID

In some cases it is clear how a risk can be avoided, in others it may involve changing processes or considering automated processes. Risks in manual handling can be related to the task itself (does it involve holding loads away from the body, stooping or twisting repetitive lifting or long carrying distances?). They may also arise from heavy, bulky loads or loads which are difficult to grasp or harmful in themselves. It may be due to obstructions in the working environment such as bumpy or slippery floors or individual circumstances – such as pregnancy or disability.

### ASSESS

The HSE advises involving employers to help carry out assessments but the final responsibility rests with employers. The assessment should be recorded if it would be difficult to repeat, but HSE guidance says there is no need to record the assessment if it is simple enough to be easily repeated or explained or handling operations are low risk, and are going to last a very short time.

It is acceptable to do a generic assessment which covers several employees, more than one site or more than work type of work but only if there are no individual or local factors to take into account (for example, size of employees, difficulty of carrying loads in different workplace configurations, regularity of manual handling in different roles).

You may need to carry out individual risk assessments for employees with a disability and to comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and you should also review any generic risk assessment if individuals, become ill, injured, or return following a long period of sickness.

### REDUCE

You must reduce the risk to the lowest level 'reasonably practicable'. This means the point at which the cost of further adjustments or precautions would be too great in proportion to the benefits. Examples of how you might reduce risk include providing better flooring in areas where loads are carried, encouraging employees to vary their work to rest muscles used in the lifting process, or to push rather than pull heavy loads.

Mechanical aids, properly chosen and explained, can help to reduce risk, as can training which should cover areas such as the risk factors in, how injuries can occur and good handling technique. Ideally it should also include practical work to allow the trainer to identify and correct problems. ■

## Employee duties

Employees also have duties under the regulations. They must

- follow appropriate systems of work laid down;
- make proper use of equipment provided;
- co-operate with their employer on health and safety matters;
- inform the employer if they identify hazardous handling activities;
- take care to ensure that their activities do not put others at risk.