

YOUR GUIDE TO MANUAL HANDLING ASSESSMENTS

Your Practical Guide



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Introduction

Up to 70% of people have suffered back pain at some time in their lives. Figures produced by the Health and Safety Executive show that a quarter of all accidents are associated with manual handling – most commonly resulting in sprains and strains, often of the back.

These injuries result in much pain and suffering, not to mention lost working time (some 50 million plus working days every year) and financial loss (the cost to industry is approximately £2.5 billion a year).

Occupations requiring heavy manual work have a higher than average incidence of back injuries. However, back injuries may also be caused by working in a stooped position, prolonged sitting in a fixed position and employing poor lifting, pushing, pulling and carrying techniques.

Definitions

Manual handling tasks are defined in the following way.

- the manual handling of loads by human effort
- human effort applied either directly to the load or indirectly (e.g. hauling on a rope or pulling a lever)
- both transporting and supporting the load in a static posture (e.g. supported by hands or any other part of the body, shoulder etc.)
- the intentional dropping or throwing of a load into a receptacle or from one person to another

Where mechanical assistance is provided, this may only reduce but not eliminate manual handling by human effort, as the load can still need to be moved, steadied or positioned (e.g. the use of a sack barrow or powered hoist).

The definition would not include:

- the application of human effort for operations other than transporting or supporting a load
- the turning of a starting handle for an engine, lifting a control lever on a machine or the pulling of a rope to lash cargo on the back of a vehicle
- loads which result from the use of implements, tools or machines which are being used for their intended purpose, for example a chain saw.

Hierarchy of Control Measures

When you initially consider manual handling risks, the following hierarchy of measures should be adopted:

- 1 Avoid so far as is reasonably practicable the need for the company's employees to carry out manual handling tasks which may involve a risk of injury
- 2 Where this is not reasonably practicable, undertake (and review as often as necessary) suitable and sufficient manual handling assessments.

Manual Handling Assessments

The manual handling risks to your company's employees should already have been assessed at a high level in your risk assessments. These should have identified all the work activities which present a significant risk of injury.

From this you need to:

- identify hazardous manual handling tasks
- evaluate manual handling risks
- take account of existing precautions.

The manual handling assessment should include details on

- the task being undertaken
- the load being handled
- the working environment in which the task is being done
- the individual capabilities of those undertaking the task
- reducing the risk of injury by considering a variety of elements, including the physical suitability of the employee to undertake the task(s)
- the clothing, footwear or other personal effects worn by the handler; and
- the handlers knowledge and training; the results of relevant risk assessment; whether the handler is of a group of employees identified by a risk assessment as being especially at risk or from results of any health surveillance.

The outcome of the assessment should ensure that appropriate steps are taken to reduce the risk of injury to the lowest level.

Consultation

To carry out a suitable and sufficient manual handling assessment, it is important to use the knowledge and expertise of those employees within the company who are best placed to have a practical understanding of the types of manual handling tasks being performed (see below). The assessments should be carried out in a logical and structured manner, contain concise information and not be over-elaborate or unnecessarily detailed.

Competent Person

All manual handling assessments should be undertaken by a competent person who has suitable training and relevant knowledge as well as practical experience of the tasks being assessed. Whether you decide to select an individual or a team of assessors, those chosen should receive basic training to give them the relevant knowledge and expertise to carry out a successful assessment. This training should include:

- the requirements of the Manual Handling Operations Regulations
- the nature of the handling operations
- a basic understanding of human capabilities
- identification of high risk activities
- practical steps to reduce risk.

In most cases assessments can be undertaken in-house; however, where complicated or highly technical manual handling risks are involved, you may need to seek specialist help.

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