

Toolbox Safety Talks

Hazardous manual task safety

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Talk about safety at work

Take ten minutes at 10am, or at any other time of the day, to talk with your team about workplace safety. This training resource is designed to help you deliver short presentations covering a series of work health and safety topics.

READ OUT

Here is an example of a hazardous manual task incident.

A company was convicted and fined \$100,000 after an untrained worker was seriously injured while lifting a 20kg bag of onions.

The 17-year old worker complained of a sharp pain in his back and collapsed a short time after lifting the bag. He never walked again.

ASK THE QUESTION

What factors contributed to the incident?

Possible answers:

- *inadequate instruction on stock handling*
- *bag too heavy – could have been two bags of 10kg*
- *age and experience – wanting to impress, overconfident in abilities*
- *no equipment to help him lift*
- *no training in lifting*
- *no supervision.*

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Manual tasks across all industries commonly cause injuries. Manual task safety is more than just keeping your back straight and knees bent, or lifting properly – it includes tasks such as carrying, pushing and pulling, and holding or restraining.

Manual tasks involve more than just lifting, and the risk of injury is due to more than just the weight of the object being handled. Factors such as awkward movements, fixed postures and how long and how quickly a task is performed are also important.

Injuries can be the result of gradual wear and tear from frequent or prolonged activities, or sudden damage. For example, an injury can result from repetitive lifting or a single lift of something very heavy or awkward to handle, or from tripping and falling while carrying an object.

Jobs involving physical stress or repetitive movements have the highest rates of injuries – over half the lost-time injuries involving nurses and health care workers, cleaners, packers and store people are manual task injuries.

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Remember these important facts about manual task-related injuries.

- **Increased weight equals increased risk.** People differ so it is difficult to define what an unsafe weight is. But if you find a manual task difficult or strenuous, it may be a significant risk for you. Discomfort can be an early warning sign, especially if it persists, reoccurs the next day or persists after the weekend/rostered days off.
- **The risk is not just about weight.** Often the risk is due to a combination of the weight and your posture, such as bending forward, and movements such as holding the load away from the body or twisting, as well as the shape or configuration of the load.
- **Manual tasks can cause gradual wear and tear to the body.** This damage can build up over time.
- **Where repetitive movements or fixed or awkward postures are concerned, the risk of injury is cumulative.** Regardless of how many different tasks a worker performs each day, a significant risk of injury can be present if the total time spent performing similar postures, actions or movements exceeds one hour.

While these risk factors can make identifying manual task hazards difficult, the more risk factors present, the greater the scope for decreasing the risk.

Workplace health and safety is everyone's responsibility

A Person Conducting a Business or Undertaking (PCBU) has a duty of care under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2012 (SA)* to provide a safe workplace and systems of work, information, instruction, training and an opportunity for workers to consult about work health and safety. There are regulations which require the PCBU to identify and manage each hazard and risk that is likely to arise from manual handling tasks in the workplace.

Firstly, this means identifying manual tasks and the possible hazards associated with them. This involves:

- **checking injury/hazard reports to identify manual task injuries** – reporting is vital
- **consultation between PCBUs, workers, health and safety representatives and committees** – this is an important part of the risk management process to identify hazards before an injury, illness or incident occurs, and to develop measures to eliminate or reduce the associated risks. Consultation should include asking about which manual tasks may lead to physical strain, talking to supervisors about any difficulties that staff experience carrying out manual tasks, and talking to health and safety representatives and committees about problems they are aware of.
- **looking at tasks** – carry out workplace inspections, observe the manual tasks and identify any relevant contributing factors e.g. slippery floors
- **collecting information** – check injury/hazard reports, ask other people in the workplace and examine the tasks. By doing this, you can collect information on the tasks performed, the age and sex distribution of those injured through manual handling, occupation, department or section of those injured or involved in manual tasks, geographical location where the injury or complaint occurred, and the type of injury.
- **looking for trends** – from the collected information, identify trends or common problems. These trends will help to determine which tasks pose a more serious problem than others.

Then, a risk assessment should be undertaken to determine level of risk and appropriate controls, giving us the opportunity to discuss issues and negotiate suitable arrangements for reducing manual task injuries.

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Some of the controls that could be used are:

- **modifying workplace layout and equipment** – use lifting aids
- **modifying the load** – redistribute the weight
- **controlling the work environment** – like floor coverings, heat, light and space
- **redesigning the work patterns** – change the frequency and type of tasks done
- **making sure everyone has general and task specific training.**

As workers, we have a responsibility to protect our own health and safety and that of others affected by our work, and to abide by procedures and policies in relation to workplace safety. We should all be provided with appropriate information and training to allow us to fulfil that obligation.

ASK THE QUESTION

Before I finish, is there anything that we could be doing better in this workplace to prevent manual handling problems?

Take notes about suggestions ... don't panic if there aren't any takers!

READ OUT

OK, unless anyone has any questions, thanks for participating.