

Your health and safety guide to Manual handling



If this Hazard Guide does not contain an up-to-date *More information* sheet, please go to www.worksafe.vic.gov.au to download the PDF or contact us on 1800 136 089 to request a printed copy.

There's plenty more information
about health and safety...
www.worksafe.vic.gov.au
1800 136 089

Manual handling is the biggest cause of injuries in Victorian workplaces.

Each year, thousands of workers are injured doing manual handling tasks that are unsafe. The result can be debilitating long-term conditions that can severely affect a person's quality of life.

While most jobs involve some form of manual handling, it doesn't have to be dangerous.

This guide will help you understand the problem, and will explain what you need to do to make your workplace safe.



In this guide

About the problem

- What is manual handling?
- What injuries can manual handling cause?

Your legal duties

- The law
- Information for employers
- Information for employees
- Information for designers, manufacturers and suppliers
- Compliance and enforcement

How to comply

- Consult
- Find
- Fix
- Review

Glossary

About the problem

What is manual handling?

Manual handling means using your body to exert force to handle, support or restrain any object, including people or animals.

It is not just lifting or carrying heavy objects, it includes lifting, pushing, pulling, holding, lowering, throwing, carrying, packing, typing, assembling, cleaning, sorting and using tools.

The term is not limited to handling heavy objects – pruning plants, stacking items onto a shelf, helping a patient into a bath and even using a keyboard are all examples of manual handling.

Hazardous manual handling involves:

- repetitive or sustained application of force, awkward postures or movements
- tasks that people would find difficult due to the degree of force applied (high force)
- exposure to sustained vibration
- manual handling of live people or animals
- manual handling of unstable loads that are difficult to grasp or hold.

What injuries can manual handling cause?

While not all manual handling tasks will cause injury, hazardous manual handling can lead to many serious conditions, including:

- muscle sprains and strains
- back injuries
- soft-tissue injuries to the wrists, arms, shoulders, neck or legs
- abdominal hernias
- chronic pain.

Collectively, these conditions are known as musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs).

Your legal duties

The law

Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 (OHS Act)

The OHS Act came into effect on 1 July 2005. It sets out the key principles, duties and rights in relation to occupational health and safety. The duties imposed by the Act cover a wide variety of circumstances, recognising the need for a duty-holder to have flexibility in determining what needs to be done to comply.

The OHS Act is based upon the following key health and safety principles:

- All people – employees and the general public – should have the highest level of protection against risks to health and safety.
- Those who manage or control things that create health and safety risks in the workplace are responsible for eliminating or reducing the risks, so far as is reasonably practicable.
- Employers should be proactive in promoting health and safety in the workplace.
- Information and ideas about risks and how to control them should be shared between employers and employees.
- Employees are entitled – and should be encouraged – to be represented in relation to health and safety issues.

Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2007 (OHS Regulations 2007)

New Regulations for occupational health and safety came into effect on 1 July 2007.

The manual handling part of the OHS Regulations 2007 is intended to prevent and reduce the number and severity of injuries associated with manual handling tasks.

To do this, the Regulations impose specific legal responsibilities on employers, employees, and designers, manufacturers and suppliers for the control of risk from hazardous manual handling.



Employers

As an employer, you have a general duty to make your workplace safe, as well as specific duties in relation to hazards such as manual handling.

You must identify any tasks that involve hazardous manual handling. If these tasks pose a risk of musculoskeletal disorder, you must eliminate the risk.

If it's not reasonably practicable to eliminate the risk, you must reduce the risk, as far as reasonably practicable, by:

- changing the workplace layout, the workplace environment or the systems of work
- changing the objects used in the task, or
- using mechanical aids.

If there is still a risk after using these methods, you should control it by providing information, training or instruction.

You must review (and, where necessary, revise) your risk controls if things change, if there is a report of an MSD in the workplace, or at the request of a health and safety representative.

Employees

Your employer is required to protect you from manual handling injuries.

At the same time, you have a general duty to take reasonable care for your own health and safety, and that of others who may be affected by your work, and to cooperate with your employer's efforts to make the workplace safe.

This may include using manual handling equipment properly, following workplace policies and procedures (e.g. using trolleys, team lifting), attending health and safety training, and not taking shortcuts that could increase manual handling risks.

You can also help your employer make the workplace safer by notifying them of any hazardous manual handling tasks that you become aware of.

Your legal duties continued

Designers, manufacturers and suppliers

The safe design of plant, substances, buildings and structures plays a critical role in reducing manual handling risks in workplaces.

If you design plant, buildings or structures, or if you manufacture or supply plant or substances for use in a workplace, you must ensure that your product is safe, as far as reasonably practicable.

Manufacturers and suppliers must also provide information on the safe use and maintenance of their product when giving or supplying the product to someone else.

Compliance and enforcement

WorkSafe applies a strategy of 'constructive compliance' – a combination of incentives and deterrents – to improve workplace health and safety.

This strategy recognises that real and sustainable improvement in workplace health and safety requires active involvement from employers and employees in identifying hazards and controlling risks.

WorkSafe inspectors have the primary role of targeting unsafe workplace activity, enforcing compliance with health and safety laws, and providing guidance and advice on how to comply with those laws.

Further information on workplace inspections and WorkSafe's enforcement policy is available through the WorkSafe Advisory Service (1800 136 089) or at www.worksafe.vic.gov.au

How to comply

WorkSafe has a range of guidance materials to advise on the required processes and actions that duty-holders must take in order to meet their legal obligations. *Compliance Codes*, *Health and Safety Solutions* and *Guidance Notes* each provide detailed and specific advice for duty-holders seeking to comply with the OHS Regulations 2007. See also the enclosed *More information* sheet for a listing of guidance materials related to Manual handling.

Consult

Employees' expertise can make a significant contribution to improving workplace health and safety.

Regular, proactive consultation can help identify issues in the workplace and build a strong commitment to health and safety by including all views in the decision-making process.

Under the OHS Act, employers must consult with employees when identifying hazardous manual handling and making decisions about risk control.

'Employees' includes independent contractors (and any employees of the independent contractor(s)) who perform work which the employer has, or should have, control over.

If employees are represented by health and safety representatives, the consultation must involve those representatives – see *Your health and safety guide to Consultation* for further information.

How to comply continued

Find

While not all manual handling tasks are unsafe, manual handling is hazardous when it involves any of the following:

- repetitive or sustained force, movement or awkward posture
- high force (to move or support any object that most people would find difficult because of the effort it requires)
- sustained vibration
- handling live people or animals
- handling loads that are unstable, unbalanced or difficult to hold.

Some common examples of hazardous manual handling tasks include:

- moving large sacks of grain
- using a jackhammer
- sitting at a cramped desk and typing for long periods at a time
- using tin snips with grips that are wide apart
- steering a heavily loaded trolley through a busy warehouse.

Find all the tasks which have these characteristics. Work out whether any of the tasks you've found pose a risk.

Forces, postures, movements and vibration usually affect each other to increase the risk. For example, more force has to be exerted to pick up a box from the floor compared with picking it up from a bench at thigh height.

The longer these tasks are done, the greater the risk.

Environmental factors such as heat, cold and lighting levels can also increase the risk.



Unexpected movement, high force and awkward postures.



Repetitive twisting and bending.



Sustained awkward posture.



Exposure to sustained vibration.



High force needed to grip and move heavy sack.

How to comply continued

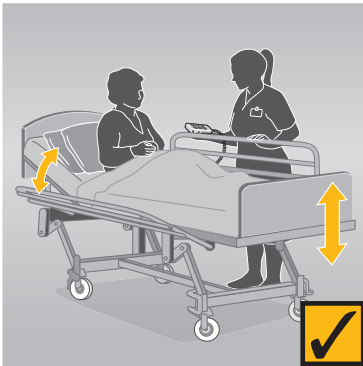
Fix

Work through the following list to control manual handling risks at your workplace. In many instances, a combination of approaches will result in the best solution.

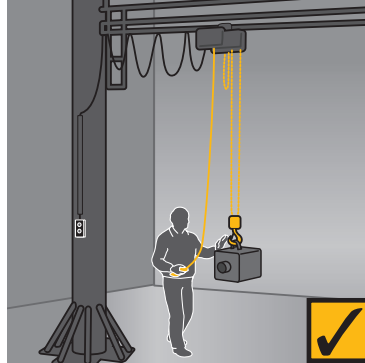
1. Eliminate the manual handling risk

The best option is to remove the hazard completely, so you should always try to do this first.

Example: Get in the appropriate equipment to do the work mechanically, and train staff in its use.



Electronically adjustable beds eliminate awkward postures.



Eliminate high force.

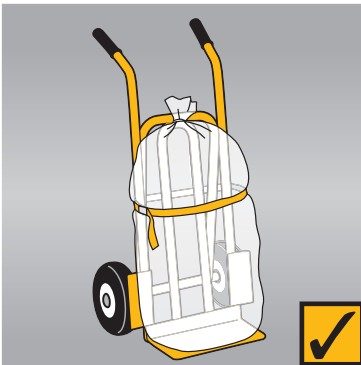


Eliminate stooping and bending.

2. Change the workplace, the objects used or the way the job is done

If you can't remove the hazard, minimise the risk by changing the workplace layout, environment or work methods, replacing the objects used in the task, or using mechanical equipment or aids.

Example: Provide trolleys and adjustable workbenches and seating, break loads into smaller quantities or use team lifting.



Eliminate carrying.

3. Provide training

If the other measures will not totally solve the problem, or if they're not suitable, you can use information and training to show employees how to do manual handling tasks with least risk.

Example: Train people involved in team lifting.

Review

It's important to review your risk controls regularly to ensure they are implemented correctly and to monitor their effectiveness.

You need to review (and, if necessary, revise) your risk controls whenever any changes are made to the workplace that could increase manual handling risks, such as changes to the way work is done or to the tools or equipment used.

A review is also necessary if a musculoskeletal disorder is reported, if you become aware of any new information about any hazardous manual handling tasks in the workplace, or if a health and safety representative requests one.

GLOSSARY

Employee – A person employed under a contract of employment or contract of training.

Employer – A person who employs one or more people under contracts of employment or contracts of training.

Hazard – A potential source of harm or injury. The potential to cause injury, illness or disease.

Health and safety representative (HSR) – A member of a designated work group elected to represent employees on matters relating to occupational health and safety.

Manual handling – Any activity requiring the use of force exerted by a person to lift, push, pull, carry or otherwise move, hold or restrain any object.

Musculoskeletal disorder (MSD) – An injury, illness or disease that arises in whole or in part from manual handling in the workplace, whether occurring suddenly or over a prolonged period of time.

Plant – Any machinery, equipment, appliance, implement or tool; any component of any of these things; and anything fitted, connected or related to any of these things.

Reasonably practicable – See section 20(2) of the OHS Act and the WorkSafe Position on *How WorkSafe applies the law in relation to reasonably practicable*.

In this series

Hazards

- Your health and safety guide to asbestos
- Your health and safety guide to confined spaces
- Your health and safety guide to dangerous goods
- Your health and safety guide to falls prevention
- Your health and safety guide to hazardous substances
- Your health and safety guide to lead
- Your health and safety guide to manual handling
- Your health and safety guide to noise
- Your health and safety guide to plant

Industries

- Your health and safety guide to construction
- Your health and safety guide to forestry
- Your health and safety guide to foundries
- Your health and safety guide to major hazard facilities
- Your health and safety guide to mines

Subjects

- Your health and safety guide to communicating across languages
- Your health and safety guide to consultation
- Your health and safety guide to controlling OHS hazards and risks
- Your health and safety guide to licensing and registrations
- Your health and safety guide to workplace amenities and first aid

Visit www.worksafe.vic.gov.au for online guidance on all of these topics and more...

The information presented in *Your health and safety guide to manual handling* is intended for general use only. It should not be viewed as a definitive guide to the law, and should be read in conjunction with the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004*.

This publication is protected by copyright. The Victorian WorkCover Authority encourages the free transfer, copying and printing of this publication if such activities support the purposes and intent for which the publication was developed.

WorkSafe Victoria is a division of the Victorian WorkCover Authority.



WorkSafe Victoria

WorkSafe Advisory Service

222 Exhibition Street
Melbourne VIC 3000

Phone 03 9641 1444

Toll-free 1800 136 089

Email info@worksafe.vic.gov.au

Head Office

222 Exhibition Street
Melbourne VIC 3000

Phone 03 9641 1555

Toll-free 1800 136 089

Website www.worksafe.vic.gov.au

Local Offices

Ballarat 03 5338 4444

Bendigo 03 5443 8866

Dandenong 03 8792 9000

Geelong 03 5226 1200

Melbourne
(628 Bourke Street) 03 9941 0558

Mildura 03 5021 4001

Mulgrave 03 9565 9444

Preston 03 9485 4555

Shepparton 03 5831 8260

Traralgon 03 5174 8900

Wangaratta 03 5721 8588

Warrnambool 03 5564 3200