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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*. Whilst every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy and completeness of this guidebook, the advice contained herein may not apply in every circumstance. Accordingly, WorkSafe cannot be held responsible, and extends no warranties as to the suitability of the information for your specific circumstances; or actions taken by third parties as a result of information contained in this guidebook.

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This guidance has been reviewed and updated for the sole purpose of amending year and regulation references relating to the Occupational Health and Safety Regulations, in line with amendments which came into effect on 18 June 2017.

WorkSafe Victoria is a division of the Victorian WorkCover Authority.
Manual handling is the biggest cause of injuries in Victorian workplaces.

Each year, thousands of workers are injured doing manual handling work that is 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 identify hazardous manual handling, and will explain what you need to do to make your workplace safe.

About the problem
- What is hazardous manual handling?
- What injuries can hazardous 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 hazardous manual handling?
Hazardous manual handling means work requiring the use of force to lift, lower, push, pull, carry or otherwise move, hold or restrain a thing if the work involves one or more of the following—

- repetitive or sustained application of force
- sustained awkward posture
- repetitive movement
- application of high force involving a single or repetitive use of force that it would be reasonable to expect that a person in the workforce may have difficulty undertaking
- exposure to sustained vibration
- handling live persons or animals;
- handling unstable or unbalanced loads or loads that are difficult to grasp or hold.

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 hazardous manual handling.

What injuries can hazardous manual handling cause?

While not all hazardous manual handling 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 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 2017 (OHS Regulations 2017)**

New Regulations for occupational health and safety came into effect on 18 June 2017. The hazardous manual handling part of the OHS Regulations 2017 is intended to prevent and reduce the number and severity of injuries associated with hazardous manual handling.

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 hazardous manual handling.

You must identify any work that involves hazardous manual handling. If the work poses a risk of musculoskeletal disorder, you must eliminate the risk, so far as reasonably practicable.

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 things used in the hazardous manual handling, 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.
Your legal duties

Employees
Your employer is required to protect you from hazardous 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 hazardous manual handling risks.

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

Designers, manufacturers and suppliers
The safe design of plant, substances, buildings and structures plays a critical role in reducing hazardous 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 2017. 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.

Find

While not all manual handling is unsafe, work requiring the use of force to lift, lower, push, pull, carry or otherwise move, hold or restrain a thing is hazardous manual handling when it involves any of the following:

- repetitive or sustained application of force
- sustained awkward posture
- repetitive movement
- application of high force involving a single or repetitive use of force that it would be reasonable to expect that a person in the workforce may have difficulty undertaking
- exposure to sustained vibration
- handling live persons or animals
- handling unstable or unbalanced loads or loads that are difficult to grasp or hold.

Some common examples of hazardous manual handling 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.

Identify all work which has these characteristics. Work out whether any of the work you’ve found poses 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 this work is 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.
How to comply

- Repetitive twisting and bending.
- Sustained awkward posture.
- Exposure to sustained vibration.
- High force needed to grip and move heavy sack.
Fix
Work through the following list to control hazardous manual handling risks at your workplace. In many instances, a combination of approaches will result in the best solution.

1. Eliminate the hazardous 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 things 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 things 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.

3. Provide training

If the other measures will not totally solve the problem, or if they’re not suitable, you must use information, instruction or training to show employees how to perform hazardous manual handling 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 hazardous 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 in the workplace, or if a health and safety representative requests one.
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| **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](http://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au) for online guidance on all of these topics and more...
WorkSafe Victoria

WorkSafe Agents
Agent contact details are all available at worksafe.vic.gov.au/agents

Advisory Service
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Email: info@worksafe.vic.gov.au
Website: worksafe.vic.gov.au

For information about WorkSafe in your own language, call our Talking your Language service

廣東話: 1300 559 141
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Italiano: 1300 660 210
普通话: 1300 662 373
Српски: 1300 722 595
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