

# Hazardous manual handling - Risk management in a small organisation

This guidance note provides a step by step approach to assist employers in small organisations to effectively manage hazardous manual handling and the risk of MSDs.

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Injuries associated with hazardous manual handling make up most of all workplace injury, illness and disease in Victoria. These injuries often result in human pain and suffering, time off from work and cost to the community.

Employers have a legal obligation under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004* (OHS Act) and the *Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2017* (OHS Regulations) to reduce, if not eliminate, their employees' exposure to the risk of musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) associated with hazardous manual handling.

This step by step approach is designed to assist employers in small organisations to effectively manage hazardous manual handling and the risk of MSDs in their workplace.

WorkSafe Victoria publishes Compliance Codes and guidance at [worksafe.vic.gov.au](http://worksafe.vic.gov.au) to further assist with the risk management process outlined below.

## 1. Consultation

Employers must, so far as is reasonably practicable, consult with employees, HSRs or deputy HSRs, if any, on matters that directly affect, or are likely to affect, their health and safety.

Consultation must occur at each step of the risk management process. Employers must share information with employees and HSRs and give them reasonable opportunity to express their views, and take those views into account before making decisions.

## 2. Provide training

Employers should provide necessary training to supervisors, HSRs, deputy HSRs and relevant employees on:

- how to recognise hazardous manual handling
- how to do risk assessments, if required, and how to find effective risk controls.

## 3. Identify hazardous manual handling

Employers must, so far as is reasonably practicable, identify any hazardous manual handling undertaken or to be undertaken by an employee.

This must be done in consultation with any relevant health and safety representatives (HSRs), deputy HSRs and employees.

Manual handling is considered hazardous if:

- it involves repetitive or sustained:
  - application of force
  - awkward posture
  - movement
- exposure to sustained vibration
- it involves the application of high force
- it involves the manual handling of live persons or animals
- it involves manual handling of unstable or unbalanced loads or loads that are difficult to grasp or hold.

Employers also need to consider other factors associated with hazardous manual handling, such as:

- the work area in which the manual handling is being undertaken
- the systems of work
- the object(s) being handled
- the equipment used to assist with manual handling.

Employers can use the worksheets in the back of the *Hazardous Manual Handling Compliance Code* to assist in the hazard identification process and document what they find.

Once hazards have been identified the employer must develop and implement risk control measures to eliminate or reduce the risks associated with the hazard, so far as is reasonably practicable. Depending on the hazard, the employer may undertake a risk assessment to assist in deciding what risk control measures are appropriate.

## 4. Do a risk assessment

Employers should consider carrying out a risk assessment if they are unsure about how to control any of the risks associated with any hazardous manual handling. When undertaking a risk assessment the employer should consider:

- the risk factors associated with the hazardous manual handling
- the causes of the risk factors
- possible control measures to eliminate or reduce the risk.

Risk assessments should be carried out in consultation with any relevant HSRs, deputy HSRs and employees doing the hazardous manual handling. Some jobs may involve several tasks, each of which will need to be assessed if they are not similar.

Employers can use the worksheets in the back of the *Hazardous Manual Handling Compliance Code* to do assessments of all hazardous manual handling to determine the potential for injury.

When deciding which risks should be assessed employers should take into account:

- the type of hazardous manual handling identified
- which hazardous manual handling has the most hazards
- which hazardous manual handling is associated with the most injuries and/or more severe injuries
- hazardous manual handling done by more than one person,
- hazardous manual handling done most often.

Employers should file all completed risk assessments and ensure they are readily accessible in the following circumstances:

- where there is a risk of an MSD occurring
- where action is required to control this risk, and
- when a review of the risk control measure is required to be undertaken.

## 5. Control the risks

Employers must put appropriate risk control measures in place to eliminate or reduce the risks associated with hazardous manual handling, so far as is reasonably practicable.

This should be done in consultation with any relevant HSRs, deputy HSRs and employees doing the task.

When thinking about how to control the risks associated with hazardous manual handling, an employer must first attempt to **eliminate the risk**, so far as is reasonably practicable. For example, if a risk of MSD arises solely from repeated back bending, eliminate the back bending by using a height adjustable trolley or table.

If it is not reasonably practicable to eliminate the risk of MSD, employers must **reduce the risk** of MSD so far as is reasonably practicable by making changes to the workplace or work such as:

- altering the work area design or layout, such as working heights and positions
- altering the environmental conditions such as exposure to vibrations, temperature of the working environment, lighting, windy conditions or slippery or uneven floor surfaces
- altering the systems of work used such as work load and pace
- changing the objects used in the hazardous manual handling such as the tools and equipment used
- use of mechanical aids which could be introduced to make the work easier.

Employers may choose to implement one or a combination of the above control measures. Employers should also provide any information, training, instruction and supervision that is necessary to support any new or changed control measures.

If it is not reasonably practicable to eliminate the risk of MSD or reduce it by implementing the controls above, employers may control the risk by providing employees with information, instruction or training on how to control risk. Information, training or instruction in manual handling techniques must not be used as the only or main solution for the risk, unless the other ways listed above cannot be introduced.

It is important to make sure that one risk control does not create another risk, like introducing mechanical aids such as tools, equipment and/or machinery that may be dangerous.

Before decisions are made to purchase any mechanical aids the employer should:

- talk to the area supervisor, any relevant HSRs, deputy HSRs and employees involved in the work about any manual handling issues
- identify and assess hazardous manual handling associated with the proper use of the mechanical aids, using the risk management process outlined above
- seek alternatives, or ensure appropriate controls are put in place, if there is a risk
- obtain advice from the supplier, occupational health and safety professionals and employees about ways of eliminating or reducing any risks
- arrange for a trial of items where possible prior to purchase
- ensure that the supplier provides any information necessary for the equipment to be properly used, including any information about manual handling risk associated with the use of that equipment.

## 6. Implement risk controls

Employers should list what risk controls need to be implemented, the timeframe in which this needs to be done and the person responsible for making sure it happens.

Employers should make sure all responsible persons fully understand what is expected of them and that they are provided with the necessary authority, resources and support to make changes.

Employers should ensure that the solutions are implemented in accordance with a plan and trial the solutions with the HSR, deputy HSR and the employees, to make sure they are effective and don't introduce any other problems.

Once the risk control measures have been introduced, make sure that they are maintained and regularly reviewed to ensure they continue to effectively control the risk.

## 7. Revision of risk controls

The final step in the risk management process is to review the risk control measures to make sure they are working as planned and revise them if necessary. The Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2017 require the risks associated with hazardous manual handling is reviewed and, if necessary, revised in the following circumstances:

- before any alteration is made to objects or systems of work
- if new or additional information becomes available about hazardous manual handling
- if there is a report of an MSD by or on behalf of an employee
- if for any reason the current risk control measures do not adequately control the risk
- after receiving a request from a health and safety representative (HSR)
- after a notifiable incident that involves hazardous manual handling.

When reviewing risk controls, employers should consider all the elements of the risk control measure and go through the risk management process outlined above.

After a report of an injury, hazard or near miss, it can be difficult to differentiate between investigating the specific incident and reviewing the risk control measures. An incident investigation tends to focus on what went wrong in the particular case with a focus on the person, where a review and revision of risk controls should be focused on the controls and what needs to go right for the task to be done safely.

Review and revision of risk control measures should include the following steps:

1. List the current risk control measures in place
2. Review the current risk control measures against the current state of knowledge and what is most effective
3. Review proposed risk control measures to ensure they are the most effective
4. Implement the revised risk control measures

Go to [worksafe.vic.gov.au](https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au) for more information on an employer's consultation obligations.

## Further information

- *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004*
- *Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2017*
- *Hazardous Manual Handling Compliance Code*

## Contact Details

Contact us on: **1800 136 089**

Email us at: **info@worksafe.vic.gov.au**

For further information on occupational health and safety, go to the website: **worksafe.vic.gov.au**

*This guidance material has been prepared using the best information available to the Victorian WorkCover Authority, and should be used for general use only. You should always check the Victorian Occupational Health and Safety Act and make your own judgement about what action you may need to take to ensure you have complied with the law.*

*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.*