Musculoskeletal Injury Prevention

Information about WorkSafe’s construction safety focus on reducing the risks of musculoskeletal injuries and advise on the guidance material available to industry on controlling the risks.

Background
Musculoskeletal injuries are the most common injuries sustained by Victorian construction workers. WorkSafe Inspectors are currently visiting construction sites to ensure that the hazards and risks that often cause these injuries are being adequately controlled.

The two leading causes of musculoskeletal injuries are:

1. **Hazardous Manual Handling** which can cause injuries known as Musculoskeletal Disorders (MSDs), and

2. **Slips and trips** whilst moving around site.

What are MSDs?
MSDs are typically soft-tissue injuries, illnesses or diseases that arise in whole or in part from manual handling in the workplace.

MSDs can occur suddenly or develop over a period of time (eg overuse injuries). MSDs can have significant and long term impact on workers and can end careers.

- In the last ten years almost 13,000 injured workers have made workers compensation claims for MSD injuries
- The cost to the construction industry is over $652 million.

Hazardous manual handling in construction
Hazardous manual handling in construction is manual handling (any activity that uses physical force to lift, lower, push, pull, carry or otherwise move, hold or restrain an object) that involves activities including:

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

Slips and trips
Slips and trips are the second highest cause of musculoskeletal injuries but also often result in fractures, head injuries or lacerations.

Reducing the risks
Duty holders (typically, builders and sub-contractors) can reduce the risks of common musculoskeletal injuries by applying some basic risk control measures.

**Hierarchy of Risk Control for Hazardous Manual Handling**

1. **Eliminate the risk of MSD**
   For example: arrange for bulky materials to be delivered to the final work location, or use mechanical load shifting devices (eg cranes, material hoists, forklifts) to move materials around the site.

2. **Reduce any remaining risk by:**
   - changing the workplace layout, the environmental conditions, where the task is undertaken, or the systems of work used, or
   - using mechanical aids.
     For example:
     - Off-site manufacturing of wall panels and roof trusses.
     - Provide appropriate mechanical aids and equipment (e.g. trolleys to move materials, scissor lifts to reduce employees reaching / working above their head).
     - Provide lifting points or handles for heavy or awkward loads.
     - Use job rotation / work variation to reduce exposure to repetitive work or work that requires significant amount of force.

3. **Reduce any remaining risk by providing information, instruction and training**
   Note: A combination of risk control measures will usually be required.

**Basic risk control measures for slips and trips**

- Ensure all site slip and trip risks are controlled
- Keeping access way clear from materials/waste
- Install ramps at changes in surface levels
- Fix down any raised floorboards or sheets
- Fill-in and compact surface penetrations (ASAP)
- Use extension lead stands or hooks
- Limit mud generation by using crushed rock
- Limit mud inside by having boot scrapers
- Regular site clean-ups & inspections
Construction Safety Focus

Further Information
Visit worksafe.vic.gov.au to download guidance, including:
- Code of Practice - Manual handling
- Your Health And Safety Guide To Manual handling
- Manual Handling Risk, Assessing and Controlling
- Information about- Manual Handling: review and revision of risk control measures
- Back To Basics - Site housekeeping
- Safety Solution - Loading bricks and mortar above shoulder height

Contact WorkSafe’s Advisory Service on (03)9641 1444 or free call 1800 136 089.

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