

Ref No 5020 (v4)

Manual Handling

Injuries arising from manual handling activities are one of the biggest costs to industry, as they result in both short term and long term disabilities.

Risk of injuries resulting from handling activities can be classified under three main categories: over-exertion; cumulative damage; accidental injury. Injuries can range from disc prolapse; muscle strain; falls; repetitive strain; cuts and crushes.

The Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992

These Regulations place duties on both the employer and the self employed with regard to the assessment of manual handling activities within the workplace, if the risk cannot be avoided.

Employer Duties under these Regulations

Employers should, wherever possible, avoid the need for employees to undertake manual handling operations at work thereby eliminating the risk of injury.

Where it is not possible or practical to avoid manual handling, then employers are required to assess manual handling activities by looking at the following factors: Load, Individual, Task, Environment (LITE).

The Load - size; weight, shape; centre of gravity; physical hazards such as sharp edges; temperature; chemical hazards such as dangers of spillage which may dictate the use of personal protective equipment.

The Individual: physical characteristics such as capabilities; height; size; gender; pregnancy; training; knowledge.

The Task: mechanisation; working height and posture; frequency; duration.

The Environment: space and layout; working surface height; floor area; temperature; light; noise; vibration; weather.

Employee Duties under these Regulations

Employees are required to make use of the control measures, lifting aids, mechanical aids, systems of work, etc, provided by the employer in order for him to comply with his responsibilities under these Regulations.

Assessment of Manual Handling Activities

When carrying out an assessment of the risks to health during manual handling, the employer should consider the following factors:

The Loads

Are they:

- Heavy?
- Bulky or unwieldy?
- Difficult to grasp?
- Unstable, or with contents likely to shift?
- Sharp, hot or otherwise potentially damaging?

Individual Capability

Does the job:

- Require unusual strength, height, etc?
- Create a hazard to those who might reasonably be considered to be pregnant or to have a health problem?
- Require special information or training - e.g., kinetic handling - so as to ensure safe individual performance?

The Tasks:

Do they involve:

- Holding or manipulating loads at distance from trunk?

Unsatisfactory bodily movement or posture, especially twisting the trunk,

- stooping, reaching upwards or downwards?
- Excessive movement of loads, especially excessive lifting or lowering distances: excessive carrying distances?
- Excessive pushing or pulling of loads?
- Risk of sudden movement of loads?
- Frequent or prolonged physical effort?
- Insufficient rest or recovery periods?
- A rate of work imposed by a process or payment system?

The Working Environment:

Are there:

- Space constraints preventing good posture?
- Uneven, slippery or unstable floors?
- Variations in level of floors or work surfaces?
- Extremes of temperature or humidity?
- Conditions causing ventilation problems or gusts of wind?
- Poor lighting conditions?

Key Action Steps

- Consider avoiding the need for manual handling by re-engineering the process.
- Consider reducing the risk by minimising or reducing the load/task.
- Appoint persons who have been adequately trained for manual handling assessments, and ensure that all work activities where manual handling cannot be avoided are adequately assessed - make LITE of handling!
- Conduct manual handling assessments of work activities taking into account the load, the individual, the task and the environment.
- Provide handling aids and equipment.
- Train staff and maintain training records.
- Record the assessment and review at least once every five years, or when circumstances and employees change.

References

The Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 - SI 1992/2793, HSE Books.

Manual Handling Guidance on Regulations - Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 - L23, HSE Books, 2002.

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