

Manual Handling Procedure

Nicholson Sheehan Consulting (NSC) is committed to providing and maintaining a safe and healthy workplace for all workers (the term worker includes contractors, subcontractors and volunteers) as well as clients, visitors, and members of the public. Hazards and risks to health and safety will be eliminated or minimised, as far as is reasonably practicable.

Manual Handling

Manual handling covers a wide range of activities including: lifting, pushing, pulling, holding, restraining, throwing and carrying. It includes repetitive tasks such as packing, typing, assembling, cleaning and sorting, using hand-tools, operating machinery and equipment, and handling and restraining animals.

Not all manual handling tasks are hazardous, but because most jobs involve some form of manual handling, most workers are at some risk of manual handling injury.

Good posture and lifting techniques can help reduce the risks, but research indicates that making changes to workplace design is the most effective way to prevent manual handling injury.

Manual handling – identifying workplace hazards

Some factors in the workplace may increase the risk of an injury occurring. These hazards can be identified in different ways:

- In the client's premises – follow the client's procedures, avoid manual handling, seek advice/assistance from the client's supervisor or manager. The client will have requirements for identifying hazardous manual handling and implementing risk controls.
- In your office environment – think before lifting and look for potential hazards.
- Consider the risks, get help.

Manual handling – assessing the risks

The next step is to assess which factors are contributing to the risk of injury.

Typical risk factors that can increase the risk of injury include:

- type of work – working in a fixed posture for a prolonged period of time
- layout of the workspace – a cramped or poorly designed workspace can force people to assume awkward postures, such as bending or twisting
- weight of an object – a heavy load may be difficult to lift and carry

- location of an object – heavy objects that have to be lifted awkwardly, for example above shoulder height or from below knee level
- duration and frequency – increasing the number of times an object is handled or the length of time for which it is handled
- condition of an object – more effort may be required to manipulate badly designed or poorly maintained equipment
- awkward loads – loads that are difficult to grasp, slippery or an awkward shape
- handling a live person or animal – lifting or restraining a person or animal can cause sprains and other injuries.

Reducing or eliminating manual handling risks

After identifying workplace hazards, you can do several things to control the risk of manual handling injuries. These tips can help reduce injury at home as well as at work.

Safety suggestions include:

- change the task – ask ‘Does this task need to be carried out? If so, does it have to be done this way?’
- change the object – for example, repack a heavy load into smaller parcels
- change the workspace – for example, use ergonomic furniture and make sure work benches are at optimum heights to limit bending or stretching
- change the environmental conditions – including heat, cold and vibration
- use mechanical aids – such as wheelbarrows, conveyor belts, cranes or forklifts
- change the nature of the work – for example, offer frequent breaks or the chance to do different tasks
- offer proper training – inexperienced workers are more likely to be injured.

Manual handling – protecting your back

The back is particularly vulnerable to manual handling injuries. Safety suggestions include controlling risk factors in the workplace, in addition to personal controls:

- Lift and carry heavy loads correctly by keeping the load close to the body and lifting with the thigh muscles.
- Never attempt to lift or carry loads if you think they are too heavy.
- Pushing a load (using your body weight to assist) will be less stressful on your body than pulling a load.

- Use mechanical aids or get help to lift or carry a heavy load whenever possible.
- Organise the work area to reduce the amount of bending, twisting and stretching required.
- Take frequent breaks.
- Cool down after heavy work with gentle, sustained stretches.
- Improve your fitness – exercise regularly to strengthen muscles and ligaments, and reduce excess body fat.
- Warm up cold muscles with gentle stretches before engaging in any manual work.

Professional advice about manual handling

The client's work, health & safety officer can give you advice about managing the risks associated with manual handling.

Where to get help:

- NSC Group Director
- Client's work, health & safety officer, manager, or supervisor
- Your doctor

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Procedure authorised by: Patrick Sheehan, Managing Director.