



What's So Dangerous about Manual Handling?

Manual handling includes lifting, lowering, pushing, pulling, carrying or moving loads. Loads can be inanimate (such as a box of paper) or animate (an animal or person). Any workplace may involve manual handling. Loads do not have to be heavy to create a problem. Even a light load can cause a problem if it is carried or moved inappropriately.

How dangerous is manual handling?

Although people rarely die from manual handling injuries, HSE figures suggest that being injured whilst handling, lifting or carrying is the most common reason for absences from work over three days. Inappropriate manual handling can result in immediate acute injuries such as sprains, strains, torn ligaments and even fractures, as well as long term chronic conditions affecting the back, shoulders, wrists, elbows and knees.

What makes it dangerous?

Manual handling becomes more dangerous if:

- The load needs to be carried a long way
- The load needs to be lifted from ground level or placed at ground level
- The load is awkward (eg slippery, wet, has sharp edges)
- The load must be carried for part of the time above the head
- The person carrying the load has to twist, squat, bend, kneel or over reach in order to pick up or put down the load
- Loads need to be moved repetitively

Expensive?

Measures to manage the risks of manual handling may cost nothing more than the time taken to think a job through and design out the highest risks. Other costs might include manual handling training for staff and buying suitable equipment. For example you could buy a trolley for moving boxes of photocopy paper for only £100; a sack truck with wheels to enable its use on stairs should cost less than £200.

By contract, the cost of ignoring manual handling can be expensive. If employees have time off work with poor health related to manual handling, this will cost your business money. In addition, fines and compensation payments for incidents relating to manual handling incidents have reached over £100,000.



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What can I do about it?

You need to arrange a risk assessment of manual handling tasks in your business. See HSE advice at www.hse.gov.uk/msd/mac.

As a result of this risk assessment, a number of actions may be possible:

- **Avoid the need for manual handling.** An outline information system may avoid the need to carry paper files around; a laptop may not need to be taken to another office if data can instead be carried on a small memory stick and used on a computer in that office.
- **Reduce manual handling by using equipment.** Instead of making four long journeys from a store room to a photocopier with boxes of paper, lift each box onto a trolley and make one easier journey, with less manual handling risk.
- **Re-design a manual handling task.** Reduce the distance the load must be carried; sub-divide the load into smaller loads; share the load with a second person; move the load to a more suitable surface.
- **Provide training so employees know how to lift, when to lift and when to get help.** Teach employees to estimate the weight of a load before taking its weight completely. Ensure they know how to stand when lifting.
- **Make loads easier to handle.** Knives may be easier to carry inside a box; it may be possible to add handles, indents or grips to awkward loads.
- Label loads that present a risk so that everybody has an idea of how heavy the load is.

What does the Law say?

The Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 (MHOR) require employers to plan work so that hazardous manual handling operations are avoided so far as is reasonably practicable, that any hazardous operations that cannot be avoided are risk assessed and that risk of injury from manual handling tasks is reduced so far as is reasonably practicable.

The Health and Safety (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2002 amended the MHOR 1992 to make clearer the need to consider individual factors, such as whether an individual has the physical ability, knowledge and training to carry a load, or whether their footwear or other clothing is appropriate for the task.

The Management of Health and Safety Regulations (1999) reinforce the requirement to carry out risk assessments and to manage the risk identified.

Case law has demonstrated that an employer may be prosecuted where manual handling tasks have not been risk assessed, and sued by individuals who have suffered as a result of lack of information, training and instruction on how to carry out a manual handling task.

It is not sufficient to believe that your manual handling tasks are as safe as possible; you need to demonstrate that you have looked at the tasks and considered how to eliminate or reduce manual handling and reduce the risks posed by each task where practical to do so.

Note:

Whilst this fact sheet gives general guidance on the law relating to this topic at the time of drafting, it is not intended to be a comprehensive guide to this area of law. You are advised to seek specific advice in relation to any particular issues that need to be addressed in relation to this topic by a competent person.

