

Manual Handling

What is Manual Handling?

Manual Handling is any activity by a person, which requires the use of force to lift or shift an object.

Injuries Caused by Manual Handling

Manual handling of heavy or awkward objects is the commonest cause of injury at work. The most frequent injuries from manual handling are:

- lower back injury - damage to the ligaments, muscles or inter-vertebral discs
- injury to other parts of the body, such as the knee and shoulder
- fatigue, leading to accidents, such as trips and falls
- aggravation of heart or lung diseases, such as heart failure or asthma
- abdominal hernias.

How to Reduce the Risks of Manual Handling

- Eliminate or reduce the hazard or use a safer alternative e.g. use lightweight bamboo instead of heavy hardwood for fencing
- Use an engineering or design solution, for example store heavy and frequently used objects between shoulder and knuckle height
- Devise a safer work practice e.g. use lifting aids such as trolleys, barrows or ropes, lift in teams, roll rather than lift
- Use personal protective equipment such as steel capped boots, gloves.

3-Stage Approach to Manual Handling

1. Stop and survey the situation to identify the risk
 - clear the path
 - look high, look low, look where you want to go
2. Assess the risk
 - weight of the load
 - shape of the load and ease of gripping
 - position of the load in relation to your body
 - how long will you have to lift or push for?
 - how far you will have to lift or push?
 - how many times will you have to lift or push the load?
3. Do the manual handling only when you have worked out how to control the risk

Weight limits

Legal limits:

- Women (all ages): 16 kg
- Men aged 16 to 18 years: 18 kg
- Men over 18: no legal limit

Advisory limits in codes and workplace awards:

- weight limit for men varies from 20 kg to 55 kg
- when seated, do not lift in excess of 4.5 kg

How to Lift

Traditional advice to keep the back straight and knees bent in a squatting position when lifting is no longer recommended.

It is safer to follow your instincts as to what feels most natural and comfortable in each situation.

Situations to Avoid

- lifting above the shoulders
- twisting movements
- sideways bending
- sudden jerking movements
- lifting at arms length
- awkward shaped objects
- objects without suitable grips
- prolonged or repetitive manual handling without rest breaks

The Golden Rule: Don't be afraid to ask for help if you have to lift or push a heavy object.

Potential Hazards at Community Gardens

- lifting timber, sleepers, lumps of concrete, benches, etc.
- pushing heavily laden barrows, especially over uneven ground
- improper use of tools
- sun exposure
- can you identify any others?

