**Manual Handling Awareness Procedure**

# Introduction

## What is Manual Handling?

Manual handling is any activity requiring the use of force, exerted by a person to lift, lower, push, pull or carry or otherwise move, hold or restrain an object, person or animal.



## What is hazardous manual handling?

Hazardous manual handling is work which requires a person to use force to lift, lower, push, pull, carry, move, hold or restrain something. It's hazardous manual handling if it involves:

* Repeated or sustained application of force
* Sustained awkward posture
* Repeated movements
* Single or repeated use of high force, where it would be reasonable that the person may have difficulty undertaking it. For example, lifting a heavy object.
* Exposure to sustained vibration
* Handling live people or animals
* Handling loads that are unstable, unbalanced or hard to hold or grasp.

Hazardous manual handling doesn't just involve heavy objects. Bending to sort materials, stacking items onto a shelf, using a grinder and even using a keyboard are all examples of hazardous manual handling.

## Compliance code

The Compliance code: Hazardous manual handling provides information about identifying hazards and controlling risks associated with hazardous manual handling and information to help duty holders meet their obligations. You'll find a link to the Compliance code: Hazardous manual handling on this page.

## Hazardous manual handling injuries

Hazardous manual handling can cause injuries known as musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs). These injuries can be debilitating, long-term and severely affect a person's quality of life. MSDs can include:

* Sprains and strains
* Back injuries
* Soft-tissue injuries to wrists, arms, shoulders, neck or legs
* Soft-tissue hernias
* Chronic pain.

## Hazardous manual handling legal duties

### Employers

As an employer, you have a general duty to make your workplace safe. You also have specific duties relating to hazards such as hazardous manual handling.

Employers must identify any work involving hazardous manual handling. If there is a risk of an MSD then you must eliminate the risk, as far as reasonably practicable.

If it's not reasonably practicable to eliminate the risk, employers must reduce the risk, as far as is reasonably practicable, by:

* changing the workplace layout, the workplace environment or the systems of work
* changing the things used in the hazardous manual handling, such as characteristics of the load or equipment used to handle the load
* using mechanical aids
* a combination of the above.

If there is still a risk after using these methods, employers must reduce the risk as far as is reasonably practicable by providing information, training or instruction. You can only use information, training or instruction to control the risk if none of the other risk control measures is reasonably practicable.

Employers must review and, where necessary, revise risk controls:

* if the way the work is done, or where it is done, is changing or going to change
* if new or additional information about hazardous manual handling becomes available
* if an MSD in the workplace is reported by or on behalf of an employee
* after any incident involving death or medical or hospital treatment for a serious injury, as described in Part 5 of the OHS Act that involves hazardous manual handling
* if, for any other reason, the risk control measures do not adequately control the risks
* where a Health and Safety Representative (HSR) has made a request in accordance with the OHS Regulations.

When deciding how to control the risk of an MSD, an employer must take the following into account:

* postures
* movements
* forces
* duration and frequency of the hazardous manual handling
* environmental conditions including heat, cold and vibration that directly affect the person doing the hazardous manual handling.

#### Employees

Employers must protect employees from hazardous manual handling injuries. At the same time, employees have a general duty to take reasonable care for their own health and safety, and the health and safety of others who may be affected by an employee's work.

As an employee you also have a general duty to cooperate with your employer's efforts to make the workplace safe. This duty may include using manual handling equipment properly and following workplace policies and procedures. An employee's duty may also include attending health and safety training and not taking shortcuts that could increase hazardous manual handling risks.

Employees can also help their employer make the workplace safer by notifying the employer of any hazardous manual handling they become aware of.

### Designers, manufacturers and suppliers

The safe design of plant, substances, buildings and structures is important in reducing hazardous manual handling risks in workplaces.

If you design plant, buildings or structures, or if you manufacture or supply plant or substances for a workplace, you must make sure, as far as is reasonably practicable, that your product is safe. Manufacturers and suppliers must also provide information on the safe use and maintenance of their product when giving or supplying the product to a workplace. The Compliance code: Hazardous manual handling has full details of duties relating to hazardous manual handling.

## How to find and fix hazardous manual handling

Employers have an obligation to identify hazardous manual handling in the workplace, and to make it safe. The WorkSafe Victoria website has tools and guides such as the Compliance code: Hazardous manual handling and other resources to help employers find and fix hazardous manual handling.

### Consult

Involving employees, relevant contractors and HSRs in health and safety issues can result in a safer workplace. That's why consultation is an important part of risk management. In certain situations employers must consult about health and safety issues with employees and HSRs, if they have them.

### Find the hazards

While not all manual handling is unsafe, hazardous manual handling may occur when work requires a person to use force to lift, lower, push, pull, carry or otherwise move, hold or restrain something. Employers need to find all the work that involves hazardous manual handling, and determine whether the work poses a risk. Examples of hazardous manual handling include:

* moving heavy and large sacks of grain
* using a jackhammer
* sitting at a cramped desk and typing for long periods at a time
* using tin snips with grips that are wide apart
* pushing a heavily loaded trolley through a busy warehouse.

### Assess the risks

Once employers find hazardous manual handling in the workplace, they need to assess the risk of the hazardous manual handling causing an MSD. Employers don't have to do a formal risk assessment if there is already knowledge and understanding about the risk and how to control it.

Forces, postures, movements, vibration, duration, frequency and environmental conditions can affect each other to increase the risk of injury. For example, it takes more bending and twisting of the back to pick up a box from the floor than from a bench at mid-thigh height. The longer the work is done, the greater the risk. Environmental factors such as heat, cold and lighting levels can also increase the risk.

Work-related stress can affect the development of MSDs. For example, job demands, low job control and poor support might affect how someone goes about their job.

### Control the risks

Employers must, so far as is reasonably practicable, control risks in the workplace, and the OHS Regulations explain how employers need to approach their risk control measures.

Risk controls are ranked from the highest level of protection to the lowest. This ranking is known as the hierarchy of control. Under the hierarchy of control, employers must consider and apply the highest level of control, so far as is reasonably practicable, before considering the next level of control.

Employers must work their way through the hierarchy of control until it eliminates or reduces the hazardous manual handling risk so far as reasonably practicable. Often employers will need to use a combination of risk control measures to effectively control the risk.

Follow these steps in order to control risks from hazardous manual handling:

1. Eliminate the risk completely. Always try to eliminate the action or activity that can cause the injury by changing the thing that is being handled. For example, use bulk bags of stock that have to be handled with a forklift instead of repetitively manually lifting lots of heavy bags.
2. Reduce the risk by changing the workplace or the work. You can reduce the risk by changing things like the workplace layout, environment or work systems. You could also change the things used to help with safe handling, or use mechanical aids. Some examples are altering the height of a bench, changing the tools used to carry the load or reorganising the work flow.
3. Give employees information, instruction or training on how to reduce the risk of injuries. It’s important to realise you can only use information, instruction or training to control a risk if none of the other risk control measures is reasonably practicable.

Remember, employers can use a combination of controls across the hierarchy to provide the highest level of protection for employees.

### Review risk controls

Employers should review and, if necessary, revise risk controls to make sure the controls are working properly. Review and revise risk controls in the following circumstances:

* if the way the work is done, or where it is done, is changing or going to change
* if new or additional information about hazardous manual handling becomes available
* if there is a report of an MSD in the workplace
* after any incident involving death or medical or hospital treatment for a serious injury, as described in Part 5 of the OHS Act
* if, for any other reason, the risk control measures do not adequately control the risks
* where a Health and Safety Representative (HSR) has made a request in accordance with the OHS Regulations.