



Manual Handling



Introduction

This section seeks to give practical guidance to employers on complying with the Manual Handling of Loads Regulations, which form part of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Applications) Regulations 2007. There are three key requirements:

- Avoidance of manual handling.
- Reduction of manual handling.
- Risk assessment of manual handling tasks.

Injuries arising from manual handling account for one-third of all injuries reported to the HSA and often lead to chronic illness and disability.

If manual handling is a major activity in your workplace, then it is likely that it will need to be addressed as part of the risk assessment process. The benefits of completing this risk assessment include more efficient work procedures that eliminate unnecessary handling activities and reduced absenteeism due to workplace injury.

Do I need to assess every manual handling activity?

Manual handling is a physical activity that takes place in every workplace, and in some cases the activity does not pose a problem. However, it can be a potential workplace hazard when an employee is required to handle heavy loads, which could result in a back injury or other musculoskeletal disorder.

The type of manual handling activity that needs to be assessed is defined in the

Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007: Manual handling involves any transporting or supporting of any load by one or more employees, and includes lifting, putting down, pushing, pulling, carrying or moving a load, **which by reason of its characteristics or unfavourable ergonomic conditions, involves risk, particularly of back injury, to employees.**

Figure 3.1 illustrates a manual handling activity that would need to be addressed as part of the risk assessment process. A characteristic of a load that involves risk is the barrel weighing 80 kg. An unfavourable ergonomic condition is the physical strain involved in having to lift such a load.



Figure 3.1

It is important to be aware of what happens in your workplace and to understand the type of work that is carried out there. It is unlikely to take you very long to identify those manual handling tasks that would need to be addressed as part of the risk assessment process.

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Why does manual handling result in a risk of injury or ill health?

Many of the problems that cause back pain are the result of injury and damage to a disc. Bending over results in pressure on the discs, and may also cause a disc to bulge backwards towards the spine.

Twisting and bending together put the greatest stress on the spine, especially on the discs, and are examples of work conditions that increase the risk of back injury. Figure 3.2 illustrates some examples of work conditions that involve risk:

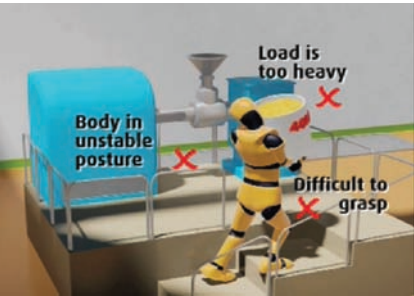


Figure 3.2

How do I carry out a risk assessment of manual handling tasks?

You should begin by walking through the workplace and making a list of work activities that involve significant manual handling. In completing this walkthrough it is important to consult with employees as they are best placed to explain how each task is carried out. The five stages in a manual handling risk assessment process are:

Stage 1: Assess how the manual handling task is carried out

This stage involves collecting information on how the task is performed and identifying the key stages in the task. This should be a team effort involving consultation with those that normally do the job. You (or the person carrying out the assessment) should have a thorough practical understanding of the type of manual handling tasks being carried out.

Stage 2: Collect all technical details

It is important to collect good quality information about the task. This can include:

- Information on the load weight and load size.
- The number of manual lifts required to complete the task.
- General information on the work environment (e.g. Is the floor slippery?).
- Photographs of the work task can make it easier to visualise potential hazards.

Remember that the information you collect at this stage in the risk assessment process is critical to understanding whether there are manual handling hazards that will need attention.

Stage 3: Identify the problems or risk factors that need to be improved

At this stage you need to identify the risk factors that exist in the manual handling activity. The HSA has published guidance entitled Management of Manual Handling in the Workplace, which is designed to

help you decide whether there are certain risk factors present.

As an example, consider the barrel-handling activity depicted in Figure 3.3.



Figure 3.3

There are a number of risk factors in this scene (as highlighted in Figure 3.4). They are:

- Load is too heavy.
- Load is difficult to grasp.
- Load is too large.
- Physical effort is too strenuous.



Figure 3.4

Stage 4: Identify what improvements you can put in place

Once you have identified the risk factors, it is necessary to investigate potential solutions. Efforts should be made to:

- Organise the work activity to allow the use of mechanical aids to avoid or reduce the need for manual handling.
- Clearly document the rationale for deciding on a control measure, outlining why other control measures were not possible and how the suggested control measure will avoid or reduce risk of injury.
- Consult with employees to determine whether the recommended control measures are practical.



Figure 3.5

The introduction of any control measure – such as a mechanical aid or a new work layout – means the introduction of a new work activity. Each new work activity will need to be assessed to ensure that any new hazards are identified and controlled.

Stage 5: Review the effectiveness of the control measures

Effectiveness is the degree to which the control measures have avoided or reduced the risk of injury. This will depend on the timely implementation of the changes and the level of employee acceptance.



Figure 3.6

Why should I consult Management of Manual Handling in the Workplace?

The HSA's Management of Manual Handling in the Workplace offers a complete guide to manual handling management and gives comprehensive details on the following topics:

- How to carry out a manual handling risk assessment.
- Key factors in the management of manual handling.
- Case study examples of different manual handling solutions in the workplace.
- The legislation and employers' duties.

- The role of ergonomics in addressing manual handling issues.
- A risk assessment template form. A copy can be downloaded from the HSA's website.

Who should carry out a manual handling risk assessment?

A competent person should carry out the manual handling risk assessment. Such a person will have adequate knowledge, training and experience to carry out the task properly and objectively. Depending on the situation, this may be you or somebody else within the business or you may feel the need to seek external expertise. You must be satisfied that the person conducting the manual handling risk assessment is capable of doing so properly and effectively.

Contacts/References

See Section 16 of this Toolkit for risk assessment templates.
See the HSA's website (www.hsa.ie) for copies of:

- **Guide to the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007** (see Chapter 4 of Part 2: Manual Handling of Loads).
- **Manual Handling Case Studies** (DVD).
- **Management of Manual Handling in the Workplace.**

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