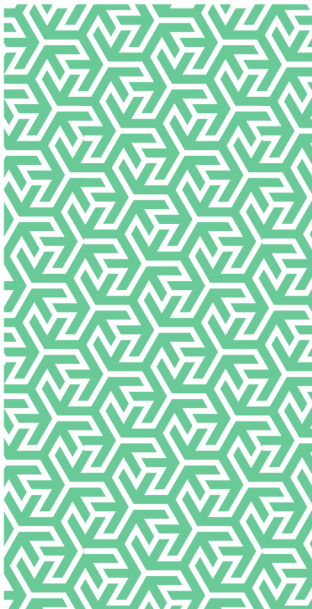


rmp

**Risk control**  
Managing Manual  
Handling



In partnership with



# Managing Manual Handling

## Introduction

This guidance document explores management arrangements that need to be in place to manage the risk of injury from Manual Handling Activities.

The chart below shows the importance of managing manual handling risks as just over a quarter of all UK workplace ill health relates to musculoskeletal problems which translates to 0.5 million new or long standing cases<sup>1</sup>.

### UK Workplace

New and long-standing cases of work-related ill health by type, 2021/22



Source: Labour Force Survey (LFS) Self-reported estimates<sup>2</sup>.

With 0.5 million people experiencing musculoskeletal issues effected by work it is essential that this risk is effectively managed. Each of the cases could present opportunities for improvements to how health and safety is managed within organisations. This guidance document explores solutions for controlling risks presented by manual handling.

Health and safety law is in place to ensure employees are not exposed to uncontrolled risks. The Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992<sup>3</sup> have been in place for over 30 years, yet the UK is still seeing high rates of ill health related to manual handling activities. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) have issued 165 enforcement notices for breaches of these regulations in the past 5 years<sup>4</sup>. Issues identified found fell into three broad themes:

1. No suitable and sufficient risk assessment in place
2. Failure to provide instruction, information and training
3. Failure to plan, organise, control, monitor and review arrangements for manual handling activities

The costs to the UK economy from manual handling injuries are significant. These risks can be managed to reduce the burden on the economy as well as organisations.

## Causation

Understanding how injuries may occur from manual handling activities will assist with the risk assessment process. Knowing that an injury could occur and that this activity would need to be controlled will help organisations to prioritise activities to allow for a reduction of risk in a progressive and controlled manner.

Injuries from manual handling activities can occur for a variety of reasons, so assessing the risk factors taking a holistic approach will enable the risks to be identified and mitigated to an acceptable level. The following activities can increase the risk of injury:

- **Excessive lifting:** when the weight of an object is greater than the persons capability the risk of injury increases
- **Repetitive lifting:** when a work activity requires repetitive lifting this can increase levels of fatigue and raise the changes of injuries occurring
- **Carrying over distances:** when objects are carried over long distances then fatigue may occur and increase risks

## Effective Risk Management

Look at failings identified by the HSE and treat them as opportunities for organisations to learn from and introduce improvements.

### Planning

“He who fails to plan is planning to fail” *Winston Churchill*.

The late former Prime Ministers words are pertinent in the world of health and safety management as planning is essential. However, failure to plan in this context could mean an incident that effects employees and leads to possible legal action against the employer culminating in financial loss.

Therefore, ensuring robust planning mechanisms are in place is essential in managing risks generally and specifically manual handling.

Exploring levels of manual handling risk present within organisations should be the first stage. This will allow proportionate risk management to be applied and the correct allocation of resources. The next stage is to assess the risks.

### Avoid Hazardous Manual Handling

Hazardous manual handling should be avoided, so far as reasonably practicable.

These activities can be avoided by:

- Redesigning the task to avoid moving the load

- Automating or mechanising the process

The best time to decide about mechanisation or automation is when designing plant or work systems. Design the layout of a process so there is very little movement of materials.

### Risk Assessment

It is a legal requirement that suitable and sufficient assessments of risks are undertaken for any hazardous manual handling activities that cannot be avoided. It is clear that taking a generic approach to these risk assessments is not suitable and each activity that poses significant risks must be specifically assessed.

Risk assessment processes shouldn't be seen as stand-alone activities as having an integrated approach will ensure robust risk management can be incorporated into other types of processes cutting or reducing the chances of duplication of effort.

Risk assessments are often treated as little valued paper exercises. This approach can result in risks not being identified or the findings not acted upon. If risks are identified and measures implemented then real improvements in health and safety management will occur.

Working with others to produce risk assessments, including people that will be affected by outcomes, will enable a full exploration of the risk and the identification of practical control measures for efficient implementation.

Assessing risks associated with manual handling can be broken into factors:

- Task – movements associated with the operation
- Individual – person undertaking the activity
- Load – the object associated with the operation
- Environment – where the operation takes place

These factors spell an easy to remember acronym – **TILE**.

### Task

Observations of manual handling activities will allow for assessments to identify movements that could increase risks of injury.

Looking at this factor in more detail allows the activity to be broken down into constituent parts which can then be isolated to allow for improvements. The accumulative effect of these small improvements will present an opportunity to reduce the overall risk of the activity.

Things to look out for are:

- How close an object can be picked up and held to an employee's body, the closer an object is kept to the body, the less pressure is exerted on to the body

- Eliminate awkward positions or movement such as twisting, stooping or overreaching can dramatically reduce risks

Team lifting activities should be supervised closely to ensure that these risks can be controlled. Lifting with more than one person doesn't naturally allow for a multiplier to be applied to the weight of the object that can be moved safely.

Risks can be reduced from team lifts when:

- Team members have clear vision at all times
- The object presents suitable handholds
- Adequate space is available to facilitate the lift
- Team members can communicate effectively

### Individual Capabilities

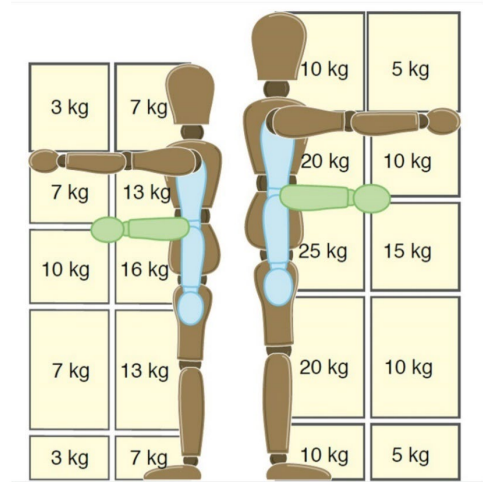
People undertaking manual handling activities come in all shapes and sizes, taking these attributes into account can be difficult. However, taking these into account will allow for tailored risk reduction for the individuals involved.

Consideration should be given to:

- The age and sex of the person
- General health and fitness levels
- Any known medical conditions, either permanent or temporary
- Pregnancy

The following diagram shows the general lift capacities of male and females. The diagram should be treated with caution as they're for illustrative purposes and does not present a specification of safe lifting weights.

Women can be stronger than men.



Source: HSE Industry Guidance 01/20 INDG143 (rev 4) – Manual handling at work – A brief guide.

## Load

Identifying the weight of an object to be lifted is the most obvious component of risk to assess. However, there are other attributes that require assessing.

Setting an upper weight limit that employees will be allowed to lift can be problematic. If employees regularly face objects in excess of this limit then alternative arrangements or equipment need to be put in place.

Not all objects are nice square boxes. They can be bulky and unwieldy which can present significant risks to the individuals conducting the lift.

Some objects can be unstable. They may contain liquids which could affect the centre of gravity of the object. Sudden shifts in the distribution of weight can increase the risks of injury.

## Environment

Taking into account the environment in which manual handling activities are undertaken is a relatively simple process if these operations are being carried out on the organisations premises. However, this can become more difficult when the environments fall outside of an organisations control, For example, making deliveries to households or other organisation's sites. Ensuring employees are empowered to make decisions about their own safety in such circumstances is essential.

In addition to the above factors, there are other things that can affect manual handling activities that need to be considered. For example, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) can hinder movement. Ensure that the most suitable PPE is issued in relation to the task.

Once all risk factors have been identified, the next stage will involve identifying practical and effective control measures. Effective control measures must use the hierarchy of control:

1. Avoid
2. Reduce
3. Engineering controls
4. Administrative controls
5. Personal protective equipment (PPE)

## Controlling the Risks

### Instruction, Information and Training

To enable integrated management, adequate training must be given to managers which is continually practiced within the organisation to exploit benefits that such an approach provides.

The person conducting the manual handling risk assessment must be competent to do so and maintain knowledge of the activities that are being assessed.

The HSE defines competence<sup>5</sup> as 'a combination of training, skills, experience and knowledge that a person has and their ability to apply them to perform a task safely'. Additionally, they also suggest factors such as attitude and physical ability can affect someone's competence.

It is essential that adequate training and support is provided to the person undertaking manual handling risk assessments as this empowers them to own the risk and ensure that adequate control measures are identified and put in place.

When identifying manual handling control measures, utilising the hierarchy of control will ensure the best solution to be identified. Asking such questions as:

- **Avoid:** Can the manual handling activity be completely avoided? Could automation help?
- **Reduce:** Can any or all of risk factors be reduced at source, such as reducing the weight of objects?
- **Engineering controls:** Can manual handling aids be used?
- **Administrative controls:** Could repetitive actions be shared, using job sharing would reduce the exposure to the risks? Manual handling training is an administrative control.
- **Personal Protective Equipment:** PPE is always the last resort. Could boots and gloves help with the activity without being a hindrance?

The hierarchy should be used in the order in which it is presented. It is good practice to record decisions made within the risk assessment.

Manual handling training needs require matching to the types of activities expected to be undertaken. Reliance on generic training may not meet all of the requirements and so task-specific training may be required.

Consideration of how to effectively communicate findings of risk assessments, any work instructions or training delivery must be given for different audiences as they are likely to have differing learning styles and needs.

### Learning Styles

In broad-brush terms, the following generational profile allude to the difference in learning styles that organisations need to consider:

- **Baby boomers:** Born between 1946 and 1964, classroom based training is effective. However, participation, reflection and feedback may increase effectiveness

- **Generation X** – Born between 1965 and 1980, self-directed training that enable them to learn on their own schedule is effective
- **Millennials** – Born after 1980, grown up with the internet. Highly personalised training and access information on-demand is their preference

### Monitoring / Observations

It is essential to ensure that all control measures identified in the risk assessments are in place and more importantly being used. Setting up regular and ongoing monitoring of manual handling activities will allow employers to establish the effectiveness of their risk reduction measures.

Observing employees 'on the job' will ensure standards are met and give additional opportunities for discussion for future improvements. Creating effective two-way communication opportunities between employer and employee will improve the health and safety culture across organisations.

### Reviewing

Employers must regularly review risk assessments to ensure they remain current and continue to adequately control the risks associated with manual handling activities.

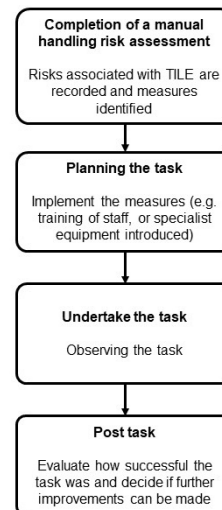
With an initial risk assessment, employers must ensure that identified controls measures are effective and will need to monitor and review the risk assessment to ensure it remains suitable and sufficient. The higher the level of risk being presented by the manual handling, the more frequently it should be reviewed.

If it is suspected that a risk assessment is no longer valid and doesn't adequately cover the risks faced then it must be reviewed. Other factors may also trigger reviews of risk assessments such as any new equipment introduced, personnel changes, new or altered working environments, or any enforcement letter or result of an incident occurring.

Reviewing risk assessments does not necessarily mean repeating the whole risk assessment process. If nothing has significantly changed and the existing identified control measures in place are still considered adequate, then just make a record of that.

### Overview

The following flowchart demonstrates the process for effectively assessing and controlling the risks from manual handling:



### Sharing

Sharing findings of risk assessments across complex organisations will help to reduce duplication of effort, allow for consistency and spread good practice. Consideration by large complex organisations should be given to effective communication strategies that create and sustain consistency to exploit benefits this will bring.

### Conclusion

Manual handling injuries present a significant risk to the health of the UK workforce. Therefore, it is essential for organisations to properly manage and control these risks. Improving management of manual handling risks will enable organisations to take advantage of successful and effective management of health and safety.

The empowerment of managers who undertake manual handling risk assessments will improve the associated risks and contribute to health and safety cultural improvements.

## References

1. Health and Safety at Work – Summary statistics for Great Britain 2022 – HSE – <https://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/overview.htm>
2. Labour Force Survey – Self Reported Estimates – <https://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/lfs/index.htm>
3. Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 – <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/1992/2793/contents/made>
4. HSE Notice Database – <https://hse.gov.uk/enforce/enforcementguide/notices/notices-intro.htm>
5. Definition of competency – HSE – <https://www.hse.gov.uk/competence/what-is-competence.htm>

## Further information

For access to further RMP Resources you may find helpful in reducing your organisation's cost of risk, please access the RMP Resources or RMP Articles pages on our website. To join the debate follow us on our LinkedIn page.

## Get in touch

For more information, please contact your broker, RMP risk control consultant or account director.

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