



the law

England, Scotland and Wales
The Manual Handling Operations
Regulations 1992 (as amended)

Northern Ireland
The Manual Handling Operations
Regulations (Northern Ireland)
1992



Manual Handling

Manual handling causes over one-third of all workplace injuries. These include work-related musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) such as pain and injuries to arms, legs and joints, and repetitive strain injuries of various sorts.

The term manual handling covers a wide variety of activities including lifting, lowering, pushing, pulling and carrying. If any of these tasks are not carried out appropriately there is a risk of injury.

Why is dealing with manual handling important?

Manual handling injuries can have serious implications for the employer and for the person who has been injured. They can occur almost anywhere in the workplace and heavy manual labour, awkward postures, repetitive movements of arms, legs and back, and previous or existing injuries can increase the risk of a manual handling injury.

What do I have to do?

To help prevent manual handling injuries in the workplace, you should avoid such tasks as far as possible. However, where it is not possible to avoid handling a load, employers must look at the risks of that task and put sensible health and safety measures in place to prevent and avoid injury.

For any lifting activity

Always take into account:

- Individual capability
- The nature of the load
- Environmental conditions
- Training
- Work organisation

For lifting manually

- Reduce the amount of twisting, stooping and reaching.
- Avoid lifting from floor level or above shoulder height, especially heavy loads.
- Adjust storage areas to minimise the need to carry out such movements.
- Consider how you can minimise carrying distances.
- Assess the weight to be carried and whether the worker can move the load safely, or if he or she needs any help. The load can be broken down to smaller, lighter components if necessary.

For using lifting equipment

- Consider whether you can use a lifting aid, such as a forklift truck, electric or hand-powered hoist, or a conveyor.
- Think about storage as part of the delivery process; heavy items could be delivered directly, or closer, to the storage area.
- Reduce carrying distances where possible.

Good handling techniques for lifting

Think before lifting/handling. Plan the lift. Remove obstructions such as discarded wrapping materials. For a long lift, consider resting the load midway to change grip.

Adopt a stable position. Feet should be apart with one leg slightly forward to maintain balance. Be prepared to move your feet during the lift to maintain stability.

Get a good hold. Where possible, hug the load as close as possible to the body.

Start in a good posture. At the start of the lift, slight bending of the back, hips and knees is preferable to fully flexing the back or fully flexing the hips and knees.

Don't flex the back any further while lifting. This can happen if the legs begin to straighten before starting to raise the load.

Keep the load close to the waist. Keep the load close to the body for as long as possible. Keep the heaviest side of the load next to the body. If a close approach to the load is not possible, try to slide it towards the body before attempting to lift it.

Avoid twisting the back or leaning sideways, especially while the back is bent. Shoulders should be kept level and facing in the same direction as the hips. Turning by moving the feet is better than twisting and lifting at the same time. Look ahead, not down at the load.

Move smoothly. The load should not be jerked or snatched, as this can make it harder to keep control and can increase the risk of injury.

Don't lift or handle more than can be easily managed. There is a difference between what people can lift and what they can safely lift. If in doubt, seek advice or get help.

Put down, then adjust. If precise positioning is necessary, put it down, then slide it into the desired position.

Case Study # 1:

Scenario	The solution
A company kept bulk chemicals stored in tubs at floor or shoulder height. The operators were constantly reaching down or up, increasing the risk of injury.	The company drew up guidelines on the storage of heavy loads to ensure they are now stored at waist height, making lifting and handling easier.

Case Study # 2:

Scenario	The solution
A wholesale plant nursery dealt with large plants in pots. The plants were heavy, varying in size and shape. Workers reported severe back strain when handling these plants.	The company sourced a specialised barrow, which adjusted to allow for moving large plants. This means just one person is needed to transport plants. Workers no longer report back strain issues.