

**GMB Safety Representatives
Guide to**

MANUAL HANDLING

GMB Safety Representatives **Guide to Manual Handling**

Practically every job involves an amount of manual handling, be it pulling a pallet truck full of stock on a factory floor, lifting boxes of photocopying paper in an office or pushing a patient on a hospital trolley.

Unfortunately, nearly a third of all workplace accidents reported to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) involve manual handling and more absences from work are caused by manual handling injuries than by any other type of workplace accident.

Many manual handling injuries build up over a period of time rather than being caused by a single handling incident. Manual handling injuries can result in muscular strains and sprains, crush injuries, slipped discs, hernias, fractures and other bone injuries which all have the potential to leave someone permanently disabled and out of work. This is simply unacceptable.

Eliminate the hazard rather than the worker

The GMB believes that manual handling activities should be made safe for all workers not just the super fit or super strong. To make the workplace safe for all, the GMB preventative approach should be applied when dealing with manual handling hazards.

GMB Preventative Approach

1. Identify the Hazard
2. Eliminate the Hazard
3. Control the risk at source

GMB Safety Representatives should use this approach along with the information in this guide to negotiate for improvements and raise health and safety standards in their workplace.

Manual Handling - What does the law say?

The Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 place duties on employers to protect workers from manual handling injuries.

Employers should:

- Firstly, where possible, **AVOID** the need for hazardous manual handling. Avoidance means that jobs are done in a different way to eliminate or minimise handling, for example, using a lift truck or vacuum lift to move equipment.
- Where manual handling activities cannot be avoided, employers must **ASSESS** the risk of injury from any hazardous manual handling that can't be avoided.
- Once the risks have been assessed the employer must put measures in place to **REDUCE** the risk of injury



Assessing and reducing the risks of Manual Handling Injuries

The law does not specify a legal weight limit that someone can lift safely, this is because something that is fairly light could be awkward to lift or may have to be moved in a confined space which can still cause injuries. It is not just a matter of assessing the weight of a package but looking at the other factors which could increase the risk of injury. These factors are listed below:

- Twisting the body
- Stooping
- Reaching upwards
- Carrying the load an excessive distance (i.e. further than 10 metres)
- Excessive pushing or pulling of the load
- Unstable, heavy or awkward loads e.g. slippery packaging, loads with sharp edges, live loads (animals or humans)
- Insufficient rest breaks (leading to fatigue)
- Handling loads whilst seated
- Tight time deadlines
- Inadequate space
- Slippery or uneven floor surfaces
- Extremes of temperature (either too hot or too cold)
- Poor lighting
- Restrictive clothing or protective equipment (e.g. tight fitting uniforms)

These factors must be considered when carrying out a risk assessment of manual handling activities. The more of these factors there are, the higher the risk of injury. The employer must reduce the risk of injury by tackling these factors. The employer must also improve job design, often referred to as ergonomics. Solutions need not be complicated and expensive e.g. changing the layout of a workstation so that the person doesn't have to stretch to lift something, providing a trolley on wheels or a simple wedge-shaped ramp to get over the problem of carrying loads up steps. Other measures could include adequate rest breaks, team lifting/increased number of staff, provision of adequate lighting and space to carry out lifting, uncluttered and non-slip floor surfaces, a comfortable working temperature and the provision of non-restrictive clothing. It is often the people doing the job that come up with the best solutions and employers must consult with Safety Representatives when carrying out the assessments.

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Risk assessments should be regularly reviewed and updated when, for example, accident reports show high numbers of manual handling injuries and it may be that measures to reduce the risk of injuries are not adequate; new equipment is introduced and/or working methods change.

Information and Training

Your employer has a duty to provide information, including the weight of loads to be handled, and training on health and safety issues including manual handling. Workers involved in manual handling activities should be trained in safe handling and lifting techniques by an experienced and competent trainer. Safety Representatives should be consulted on the choice of training and contents of any training programmes.

Information and training is important but the main priority is for the employer to reduce the risk of injury in the first place. An employer who provides training but has not carried out any manual handling risk assessments would not be complying with the law.

Lifting Equipment

Equipment used to lift loads must in itself be safe. The lifting equipment must be strong and stable enough for each load. It must also be marked with the amount it is capable of lifting (the safe working load). All lifting equipment must be maintained, regularly examined and inspected by a competent person and any defects should be reported immediately. Workers must be trained in the safe use of this equipment.

Accident and Injury Reporting

Manual Handling injuries which result in 3 or more days off work must be reported to the Health and Safety Executive under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995 (RIDDOR).

Pregnant Workers

Pregnant workers and those who have just given birth are at more risk of injury from manual handling as hormone levels change and affect the strength of ligaments and joints. This is particularly the case late on in pregnancy when the worker is already carrying a heavy load causing strain in the lower back! Lifting combined with long periods of standing or walking adds to the risk. Other issues such as difficulties with balance and being unable to get the load close to the body can also cause problems.

The employer has a duty under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 to assess the work carried out by pregnant workers and reduce the risk of injuries to both the mother to be and the unborn child. If the work is hazardous and if safer alternative work cannot be found the pregnant worker should be suspended from work on full pay.

Disabled Workers

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 places a duty on employers to make reasonable adjustments to the workplace or employment arrangements so that a disabled person is not at any substantial disadvantage compared to a non-disabled person. This might include arranging to limit the number, size or weight of loads handled by someone with a disability that limits their manual handling capacity.

Safety Representatives - Six Steps to Safe Handling

- 1** *Where manual handling cannot be avoided, ensure that your employer has carried out a risk assessment of all manual handling activities in the workplace.*
- 2** *Ensure that you have been consulted on measures to eliminate or reduce the risk of manual handling injuries, including the purchase of suitable lifting equipment.*
- 3** *Monitor the extent of the problem in your workplace by requesting that a breakdown of manual handling accidents/injuries is reported to the Health and Safety Committee. Where problem areas are identified, request a review of risk assessments.*
- 4** *Check that the risks to pregnant workers have been assessed.*
- 5** *Check that adequate provisions have been made for disabled workers.*
- 6** *Ensure that workers are given adequate and competent information and training on safe handling and use of lifting equipment.*



Case Study One - Eliminating the Hazard

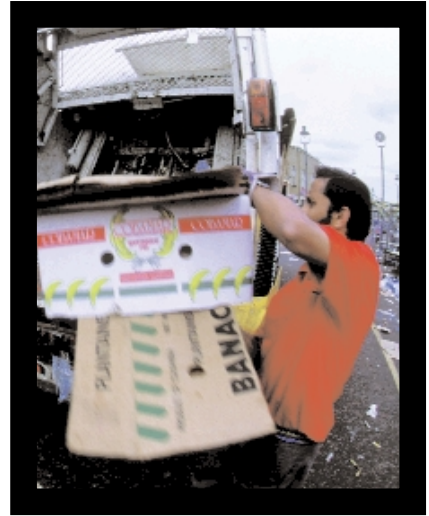
During one of the regular health and safety committee meetings the GMB Safety Representative for a County Ambulance Service highlighted the manual handling hazard of opening sliding garage doors. The doors were removed and replaced with electrically operated doors thus eliminating the manual handling hazard.

GMB/SITA 'Back in Work' Project

The GMB has been working with Europe's leading waste management company, SITA, on a project which is tackling back-injuries amongst refuse collectors.

The 12-month project, which is government funded, will undertake a detailed and comprehensive examination and analysis of manual handling and associated back-pain issues within the context of the waste management industry.

The overall aim of the project is to develop and pilot a range of practical outcomes, with an emphasis on training for refuse collectors.



Case Study Two - Ergonomic Changes

The GMB Safety Representative at a food manufacturers in the Midlands negotiated ergonomic changes to working areas, including changes to work involving the stacking of cans and filling machines.

How the GMB can help

Independent research has shown that people who are in a trade union are **50% LESS LIKELY TO HAVE AN ACCIDENT** than those who are not in a trade union.

Union/non union	Injury Rate	Actual injuries in one year
Trade Union Recognised	5.3	58,300
No Trade Union Recognised	10.9	181,500

Source: Reilly, Paci and Hall; British Journal of Industrial Relations, 33:2, June 1995

In other words:

YOU ARE TWICE AS SAFE IN THE GMB

The GMB is Britain's leading union for health and safety. To back up our Representatives the GMB has a network of health and safety specialists in each of our 10 Regions. The GMB also has a large National Health and Safety Department that is widely acknowledged to offer the best health and safety service of any trade union. **JOIN THE GMB NOW!!**



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you're safer in **THE GMB!**