

# Risk Management Guidelines

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## [Manual Handling]

### What's the problem?

The rate of injuries in Ireland due to manual handling accidents has risen significantly in the last ten years. Most injuries are to the back, though both the upper and lower limbs are also vulnerable.

The HSA 2008 Summary of Workplace Injury, Illness and Fatality Statistics Report confirms that 34.2% ( or 2619) of workplace injuries reported were as a result of manual handling duties.

In cash terms, absenteeism through workplace accidents costs small businesses an estimated €793 million per annum. This takes no account of other direct costs such as the requirement to replace absent staff with other workers or overtime payments, and the cost of medical referrals; or of the indirect costs such as the effect on productivity and quality, the increased work pressure on other colleagues, and the admin time in managing absenteeism.

Sometimes, the sufferer never recovers and in many instances manual handling injuries build up over time rather than being caused by a single accident.

### What should I do about it?

Employers need to comply with current Health & Safety legislation, namely the Safety Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007, with particular reference to Chapter 4 of Part 2 (Manual Handling of Loads).

The General Application Regulations 2007 are made under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 (No. 10 of 2005) and set out a framework for employers to avoid or reduce the risk of injury resulting from manual handling activities.

The basic principle enshrined in this regulation is that where manual handling of

loads presents a risk of injury, the employer must take measures to avoid or reduce the need for such manual handling.

The Regulations deal with heavy physical work and address the following considerations to be made by employers:

- 1) Does the job include repeated and sustained exertions; for example, lifting, pushing or pulling?
- 2) Are mechanical lifting aids available for use whenever possible?
- 3) Have employees been trained in the proper use and selection of mechanical lifting aids?

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## What are my duties?

Under these Regulations employers should:

- avoid the need for hazardous manual handling as far as is reasonably practicable;
- assess the risk of injury from any hazardous manual handling that cannot be avoided;
- reduce the risk of injury from hazardous manual handling as far as is reasonably practicable.

Employees involved in manual handling must receive training in safe manual handling techniques.

This training will demonstrate to employees how to carry out manual handling tasks correctly and safely, thus reducing the risk of injury.

Consider the risks from manual handling to the health and safety of your employees. If manual handling operations exist, the Regulations apply.

It is important to consult and involve the workforce as employees will know first-hand what manual handling tasks are undertaken within the workplace.

## How do you know if there is a risk of injury?

It is a matter of judgement in each case, but there are certain things to look out for, such as:

- excessive fatigue;
- bad posture;
- cramped/untidy work areas;
- awkward or heavy loads;
- a history of back troubles.

## Who should make the assessment?

This is the employer's responsibility and, in most instances, should be carried out in-house since you know your business better than anyone. In the main, this will simply require a few minutes observation to identify ways of making the activity less demanding and so, easier and less risky.

What role can employees play in carrying out assessments?

Involve employees in the process since they often have a better understanding of the processes than anyone. However, final responsibility for assessments rests with employers.

## Are assessments required for each individual employee and workplace?

It is acceptable to undertake a generic assessment that is common to several employees or to more than one site or type of work. The important thing is to identify the risk of injury and point the way for practical improvements.

However, you may need to carry out individual risk assessments for employees with a disability.

## How should assessments be used?

The purpose of assessments is to pinpoint the worst features of the work - and these are the ones that should be tackled first. It is important to remember to update the assessment when significant changes are made in the workplace.

A Manual Handling Risk Assessment looks at five main areas:

- Characteristics of the load i.e. too heavy / too large, difficult to hold, unstable etc
- Physical effort required i.e. may result in back injury if physical effort is too strenuous, causes twisting of the trunk, results in the body been in an unstable posture etc

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- Characteristics of the working environment i.e. not enough room to move the object, an uneven floor surface, unstable floor or foot rest etc
- Requirements of the activity i.e. excessive lifting, lowering or carrying distances, a lack of sufficient resting periods for strained muscles etc
- Individual risk factors i.e. an employee wearing unsuitable clothing / foot wear, not having proper knowledge and training etc.
- A Manual Handling risk assessment allows control measures to be identified to reduce/remove the above manual handling risks.

## How far must the risk be reduced?

To the 'lowest level' reasonably practicable. That means reducing the risk until the cost of further precautions - in time, trouble or money - would be far too great in proportion to the benefits.

## Should mechanical aids be provided in every instance?

It depends upon whether it is reasonably practicable to do so. If the risks identified in the risk assessments can be reduced or eliminated reasonably by means of mechanical aids, you should provide them. But you should always consider mechanical aids - they can improve productivity as well as safety. Even something as simple as a sack truck can make a big improvement.

## Good Handling Technique –advice to employees

The following gives guidance to employees on good handling technique:

### 1. Stop and think

- § Plan the lift.
- § Use appropriate handling aids if possible.
- § Where is the load to be placed?

§ Do you need help with the load?

§ Remove obstructions such as discarded wrapping materials.

§ For a long lift, such as floor to shoulder height, consider resting the load mid-way on a table or bench to change grip.

### 2. Keep close to the load

§ Keep the load close to the body trunk for as long as possible.

§ Keep heaviest side of the load next to the body trunk. If a close approach to the load is not possible, slide it towards you before trying to lift.

### 3. Position the feet

§ Adopt a stable position with feet apart and one leg slightly forward to maintain balance.

§ Avoid tight clothing or unsuitable footwear.

### 4. Get a firm grip

§ Hug the load as close as possible to the body. This is better than gripping it tightly with the hands.

§ The best grip depends on the circumstances but must be secure.

### 5. Adopt a good posture

§ Start with a slight bend of the back hips and knees. Don't flex the back or straighten the knees before lifting.

§ Avoid twisting or leaning sideways.

### 6. Don't jerk

§ Lift smoothly, raising the chin as the lift begins, keeping control of the load.

§ Keep the head up and move slowly.

### 7. Put down, then adjust

§ If precise positioning of the load is necessary, put it down first, then slide it into the desired position.

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## Further Information

To help you manage your manual handling risk we attach:

- examples of outline and detailed assessment forms
- guidance on reducing the risk

The Health and Safety Authority's website [www.hsa.ie](http://www.hsa.ie) contains a large amount of additional information. Most of the information on the website can be accessed free-of-charge.

The website has detailed guides on each section of these Regulations. Each guide contains advice on where to find further information.

The Health and Safety Authority's Workplace Contact Unit (WCU) is a helpdesk resource for employers, employees and the public. You can contact the WCU through

**Locall:** 1 890 289 389 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm)

**Fax:** 01 614 7125

**Email:** [wcu@hsa.ie](mailto:wcu@hsa.ie)

Write to:

Workplace Contact Unit, Health and Safety Authority, Metropolitan Building, James Joyce Street, Dublin 1

Further information on how to address your manual handling risks can be found in the following Health and Safety Authority publications.

**HSA0272:** Safety Toolkit and Short Guide to General Application Regulations 2007

**HSA0047:** Guidance on the management of manual handling in the workplace.



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## Detailed Assessment

### Questions

### Level Of Risk

### Remedial Action

If you answer YES consider level of risk

Low Medium High

#### 1. The Tasks

	Yes	No		
Do they involve:				
a. Holding loads away from the body trunk?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
b. twisting?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
c. stooping?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
d. reaching upwards?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
e. large vertical movements?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
f. long carrying movements?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
g. strenuous pushing/ pulling?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
h. sudden movement of loads?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
i. repetitive handling?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
j. inadequate rest time	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
k. workrate set by process?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

#### 2. The Loads

Are they:				
a. heavy?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
b. bulky or unwieldy?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
c. difficult to grasp?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
d. unstable or unpredictable?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
e. harmful (hot/cold/sharp?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

#### 3. Working Environment?

Are there:				
a. constraints on posture?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
b. poor floors?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
c. variations in levels?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
d. hot/cold/humid conditions?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
e. strong air movements?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
f. poor lighting conditions?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

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Questions	Level Of Risk			Remedial Action
If you answer YES consider level of risk	Low	Medium	High	
<b>4. Individual Capability</b>				
	Yes	No		
<b>Does the job:</b>				
a. require unusual capability?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
b. hazard those with health problems?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
c. hazard those who are pregnant?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
d. call for special information or training?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
e. involve large vertical movements?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
<b>5. Other Factors</b>				
a. Is movement or posture hindered by clothing or personal protective equipment?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

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## Reducing the Risk of Injury

### 1. The Tasks

	Yes	No
Can you		
a. improve workplace layout to improve efficiency?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. reduce the amount of twisting and stooping?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. avoid lifting from floor level or above shoulder height?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. reduce carrying distances?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e. vary the work, allowing one set of muscles to rest while another is used?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f. avoid repetitive handling?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g. strenuous pushing or pulling?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h. sudden movement of loads?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### 2. The Loads

Can you and/or your suppliers help to make the load:

a. lighter or less bulky?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b. easier to grasp?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. more stable?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d. less damaging to hold?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



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## 3. Working Environment?

Can you:

a. remove obstacles to free movement?

☐ ☐

b. provide better flooring?

☐ ☐

c. avoid steps and spread ramps?

☐ ☐

d. prevent extremes of heat and cold?

☐ ☐

e. improve lighting?

☐ ☐

f. consider less restrictive clothing or personal equipment?

☐ ☐

## 4. Individual Capability?

Can you

a. take better care of those who have a physical weakness or who are pregnant?

☐ ☐

b. give employees more information e.g. about the range of tasks they are likely to face?

☐ ☐

c. provide better training?

☐ ☐

# **Risk Management Guidelines**

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**For further information on this or any other related Risk Management topic please contact the Risk Control Unit in RSA Insurance Ireland Limited at 01 – 290 1123.**