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MANUAL MATERIAL HANDLING MATTERS



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What to Look for

Manual material handling tasks may expose workers to physical risk factors.

If these tasks are performed repeatedly or over long periods of time, they can lead to fatigue and injury. The main risk factors, or **conditions**, associated with the development of injuries in manual material handling tasks include:

- Awkward postures (e.g., bending, twisting)
- Repetitive motions (e.g., frequent reaching, lifting, carrying)
- Forceful exertions (e.g., carrying or lifting heavy loads)
- Pressure points (e.g., grasping [or contact from] loads, leaning against parts or surfaces that are hard or have sharp edges)
- Static postures (e.g., maintaining fixed positions for a long time)



Repeated or continual exposure to one or more of these factors initially may lead to fatigue and discomfort. Over time, injury to the back, shoulders, hands, wrists, or other parts of the body may occur. Injuries may include damage to muscles, tendons, ligaments, nerves, and blood vessels. Injuries of this type are known as musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs).

In addition, poor environmental conditions, such as extreme heat, cold, noise, and poor lighting, may increase workers' chances of developing other types of problems.

A Proactive Action Plan



Manual material handling jobs require movement and physical activity.

But how do you find out:

- Why workplace problems are occurring?
- Which work tasks may be causing injuries or production bottlenecks or decreasing product and service quality?
- What to do about problems once you find them?
- How to reduce your workers' compensation costs?

One way to answer these questions is to be **PROACTIVE** in your problem solving. Being **proactive** simply means finding the problems first by looking thoroughly around the workplace rather than waiting for problems to occur. Then improve the fit between the work and the worker by putting the appropriate changes into place.

The process includes involving workers, observing jobs, making decisions on effective options, and then taking action. It is important to involve workers, managers, and supervisors throughout the process.

There are **FOUR STEPS** to a proactive action plan:

1. Look for clues.
2. Prioritize jobs for improvements.
3. Make improvements.
4. Follow up



4 Steps for Your Proactive Action Plan

STEP 1: LOOK FOR CLUES

Review written records (e.g., OSHA Log 300, past worker reports or complaints, and workers' compensation reports). Your workers' compensation insurance carrier may offer risk-management services that can provide workplace assessment surveys.



STEP 2: PRIORITIZE JOBS FOR IMPROVEMENTS

After detecting the problems, decide which tasks to improve and then set priorities. Consider:

- The frequency and severity of the risk factors identified may lead to injuries.
- The frequency and severity of complaints, symptoms, and/or injuries...
- Technical and financial resources at your disposal
- Ideas of workers for making improvements
- Difficulty in implementing various improvements
- Time frame for making improvements



STEP 3: MAKE IMPROVEMENTS

The goal of making changes is to **Improve the Fit** between the demands of work tasks and the capabilities of your workers. Combine operations and processes whenever possible to reduce or eliminate unnecessary manual handling of materials and products. Depending on the characteristics of the work and the workers, there may be some changes that will improve a particular task.

STEP 4: FOLLOW UP

It is important to follow up in order to evaluate if your improvements have worked. After a reasonable adjustment period, set a date to follow up on the changes made. Make sure to evaluate each improvement separately for effectiveness.



The following question may be helpful:

Has Each Improvement Reduced or Eliminated:

- Fatigue
- Discomfort
- Symptoms
- Injuries

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