Making the Best Use of Lifting and Handling Aids

What’s at Stake

Workers who perform frequent and heavy lifting are at risk for back injuries and abdominal straining that can cause hernias. Arm, shoulder, neck and wrist pain is also a risk if materials are lifted improperly.

The use of lifting and handling aids can help remove or reduce the risk of worker injury.

Most lifting and handling aids fall into one of five categories:

1. Powered Trucks and Vehicles

Forklifts, battery operated hand trucks and pallet converters.

2. Non-Powered Trucks and Aids

Pallet hand truck, pallet tilter, keg hand truck, hand truck with hydraulic lift

3. Conveyor Belts, Tracks and Chutes

Conveyors with turntables, gravity rollers, roller tracks and ball tables

4. Adjustable Height and Tilt Tables

Adjustable height turntable, sheet tables, auto-levelers and rotary tables

5. Mechanical Hoists and Vacuum Lifting Devices

Vacuum hoists, tub hoists and conveyor hoists

What’s the Danger

Worker lifting injuries can result in excessive retraining costs for an employer, wage and overtime expenses and even increased insurance premiums.

Those injured on the job might find it hard to sleep at night, lose job opportunities and find it difficult to enjoy leisure activities.

Example

A worker needed to move a heavy length of timber to the top of a stack. He knew that it was very heavy, but he was in a hurry. Rather than taking the time to determine what equipment and assistance he needed to move the timber safely, he tried to pick up the timber and push it to the top of the stack alone. The timber fell off the stack and the worker tried to catch it, suffering an injury to his lower back. He is still in daily pain and can’t stay sitting or standing for long. The worker lost his job when he was no longer able to perform his duties, and he is still searching for work several years later.

Five Ways to Protect Yourself

1. Don’t get in a rush. Take time to assess whether you can safely lift an item or if you will need the assistance of a lifting or moving aid.
2. Make sure that you have the right equipment for the job. Some materials that need to be moved are simply too heavy or awkward to for an aid and will require a forklift operator’s assistance.
3. Check terrain in terms of stability and ground surface. Ensure that the path you need to travel with the material will work with the equipment you have available to move it. Is there enough headroom? Can you maneuver the load around any corners or obstacles in the path?
4. Check the weight rating on the equipment. Don’t exceed the safe working load.
5. Follow the equipment manufacturer’s instructions for safely

loading and unloading the equipment.

If you’re at all uncertain about how to move materials without risking an injury, talk to your supervisor about the safest way to transport a load.

Final Word

Lifting injuries can be costly for an employer, and have long-term consequences for a worker. But almost all incidents can be avoided by making use of the correct lifting or handling aid.