Push or Pull?

Safety Talk

WHAT'S AT STAKE
Equipment that you use on the job may require you to apply pushing or pulling forces. Applying the wrong force, or the right force the wrong way, can result in musculoskeletal injuries.

WHAT'S THE DANGER
Most push-pull injuries are muscle strains and sprains, particularly back injuries. But pushing or pulling the wrong way can result in losing control of equipment or materials, resulting in injuries or even death.

EXAMPLES
At one of her recycling pickup points, Emily has to move a large wheeled wastepaper "tote." She prefers to grasp the handle behind her and pull the tote up the ramp. Lately she notices that her back tends to hurt at the end of the day.

Chris was moving pallets of furniture. He decided to pull the pallet jack behind him. Coming around a corner, he ran into a pallet of desks. The load behind him didn't stop, and Chris suffered a broken ankle when his foot was caught between the pallet jack and the desks.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF
Whenever possible, push. Here are four reasons why:

1. You can push harder than you can pull.
2. Facing the direction of travel while pulling means you have at least one arm behind you, twisting your back.
3. Walking backward means you can't see properly and are twisting your back and neck.
4. Walking in front of the load means you're at risk for being run over or crushed between your load and an obstacle.

Here are other ways to prevent injury:

- Don’t overload yourself or your equipment. If you can’t move the load by giving it a gentle shove, break it down into smaller loads. Use powered equipment for heavy or awkward loads.
- Move loads as short a distance as possible. If there are slopes or ramps, get help moving the load down them.
- You should always be able to see over your load. If you can’t, have a coworker “spot” you or reduce the load size.
- When pushing, handles should be at about hip height, near your center of gravity.
- Make sure the equipment is in good condition. Wheels should turn and pivot freely and be free of flat spots or excessive wear. Hydraulics should be leak-free.

FINAL WORD

Never push your luck; don’t let an injury pull you off the job. Follow your company’s materials handling policies, push wherever possible, and never take on a load you aren’t completely sure you can handle.