Safe Lifting Techniques Meeting Kit

WHAT´S AT STAKE

SAFE LIFTING TECHNIQUES AT WORK

Safe lifting techniques should be incorporated for all workplaces because back and lifting injuries are a leading cause of missed workdays. According to 2014 data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, overexertion in lifting or lowering caused an average of 12 days away from work (30 percent more than the overall average) and was the fifth-highest rate of days missed, per 10,000 full-time workers.

WHAT´S THE DANGER

DANGERS/RISK OF UNSAFE LIFTING TECHNIQUES

Manual material handling involves someone manually moving something by holding, lifting, seizing, turning, grasping, and similar actions.

As a result, workers suffer sprains and strains to the upper limbs, lower back, and shoulders. They often result in pain or disability, medical expenses, and financial burdens for workers who suffer from them.

Specific Injuries That Result from Lifting and Manual Material Handling Include:

Hand Injuries. Any manual handling task will involve the hands, whether you’re lifting, pulling, pushing, or carrying. Depending on what you are handling, it could be dangerous by itself. For example, you could cut your hands if you’re lifting a load with sharp edges or burn your hands when lifting a hot load or if you’re putting down a heavy load and failed to get a finger out of

the way. Likewise, your fingers could get stuck between the load and a wall or some other nearby obstacle.

Sprains and Strains. Workers often lift something and then regret it right after because it was heavier than realized. This commonly happens in warehouses. Stretching the muscles beyond what they can handle, and doing it over and over again, results in pain and causes sprains and strains in the wrists, arms, shoulders, and back.

Back Injuries. Lifting often leads to back injuries, particularly if workers are constantly lifting loads that their bodies simply can't handle. Twisting and stooping could make your back more susceptible to injury. The most common back injuries related to lifting include slipped discs and spine problems.

Musculoskeletal Disorders. Most musculoskeletal disorders that develop at work are due to poor manual material handling and lifting practices, specifically, tasks that require workers to:

- Turn, twist, and bend their necks, backs, and/or torsos.
- Overstretch their muscles to reach difficult-to-reach areas.
- Awkward, uneven, and heavy loads, which could include animals, people, tools, boxes, devices, or other inanimate objects.
- Work in cramped environments with uneven and unstable surfaces or flooring.

Hernias. Excessive straining by lifting heavy things could cause hernias. Older individuals are also naturally more at risk of developing them. Most cases require surgery to fix.

Foot Injuries. Dropping a load from height, instead of lowering it carefully, and gripping a load incorrectly could all result in bruised, broken, or crushed feet. Risk of foot injury is higher of workers do not wear good footwear.

Injuries from Slips, Trips, and Falls. When you carry something, it might limit your visibility to some degree, and you might not notice the wet floor, pile of cables, or obstacle on the floor. The consequences of tripping or falling while carrying a load

could be more serious since you can’t use your arms to break the fall or hold on to something.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

AVOID UNSAFE LIFTING PRACTICES

- Never hold your breath while you lift an object. Exhaling out when lifting an object is the proper technique.
- When carrying an object, do not bend or twist at the waist. If you need to turn, slowly turn with your feet.
- Don’t use a partial grip on an object. Always use two hands!
- Never obstruct your vision with an object you are carrying. Keep the object at mid-section level, from the mid-thigh to mid-chest. This is your “power zone.”
- Never forget to wear your personal protective equipment, such as gloves for grip or shoulder pads to cushion the load.
- Do not attempt to lift by bending forward. Bend your hips and knees to squat down to your load, keep it close to your body, and straighten your legs to lift.
- Never lift a heavy object above shoulder level.
- Avoid turning or twisting your body while lifting or holding a heavy object.

BEST SAFE LIFTING PRACTICES

- Keep a wide base of support. Your feet should be shoulder-width apart, with one foot slightly ahead of the other (karate stance).
- Squat down, bending at the hips and knees only. If needed, put one knee to the floor and your other knee in front of you, bent at a right angle (half kneeling).
- Keep good posture. Look straight ahead, and keep your back straight, your chest out, and your shoulders back. This helps keep your upper back straight while having a slight arch in your lower back.
- Slowly lift by straightening your hips and knees (not your back). Keep your back straight, and don’t twist as you lift.

- Hold the load as close to your body as possible, at the level of your belly button.
- Use your feet to change direction, taking small steps.
- Lead with your hips as you change direction. Keep your shoulders in line with your hips as you move.
- Set down your load carefully, squatting with the knees and hips only.

FINAL WORD

A good way to learn the right from the wrong way to lift is to practice lifting correctly a few times. You will notice that the correct way to lift is the easiest way to lift the load, with the least strain and awkwardness. To lift the wrong way will, over time, cause injury and pain. The back can be damaged quickly but can take a long time to heal.