



Manual Handling



Manual handling is work that requires a person to lift, lower, push, pull, carry, move, hold or restrain something. Manual handling can also include:

- Repeated, sustained or high force
- Sustained or awkward posture
- Repetitive movements
- Exposure to sustained vibration
- Handling people or animals
- Loads that are unstable, unbalanced or hard to hold

Hazardous manual handling can lead to Musculoskeletal diseases (MSD) or injury of the musculoskeletal system. MSD can occur through gradual wear and tear caused by repeated or continuous use of same body parts or through sudden strenuous activity or unexpected movements such as when loads being handled move or change position. MSD injuries may include:

- Sprains and strains
- Back injuries, including damage to muscles, tendons, ligaments, spinal discs, nerves, joints and bones
- Nerve injuries or compression
- Soft- tissue injuries to wrists, arms, shoulders, neck or legs
- Hernias
- Chronic pain (pain that lasts longer than three months)
- Acute pain (pain that lasts less than three months)

What can you do about it?

Before you begin a manual task, conduct a risk assessment and identify if there is the potential of harm in carrying out the activity and if there is a safer method of performing the task.

A risk assessment will reveal postures, movement and forces that pose a risk, why they are happening and what needs to be done to fix them. It is also necessary to identify and manage psychosocial risks that can increase the risk of MSD. These may include; hours worked, work-rest cycles, workplace culture, workload and job control.

The best way to **eliminate** or **minimise** MSD is to consider manual task hazards and **risks** during the design and planning stage of a workplace or a job.



Infographic: Workers' compensation claims in 2014-15, Safe Work Australia

RISK ASSESSMENT MATRIX

Consequences	Likelihood				
	Rare	Unlikely	Possible	Very likely	Certain
Catastrophic	Moderate	Moderate	High	Critical	Critical
Major	Low	Moderate	Moderate	High	Critical
Moderate	Low	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	High
Minor	Very low	Low	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Insignificant	Very low	Very low	Low	Low	Moderate

What is the law?

'General duty of care' and 'general duties' are terms used to refer to the duties outlined in the WA OSH Act. Employers, whether directly employing staff or under contract, labour hire arrangements must, to their best ability ensure that they provide and maintain a safe workplace. Workers' must to their best ability ensure their own safety and that their actions do not adversely impact on others safety of others at the workplace.

The WA OSH Act (1984) outlines a range of duties that must be undertaken by a wide range of parties within a workplace. Whereas the WA OSH Regulations (1996) provide details on how to manage or deal with more specific health and safety topics that may arise in your workplace.

What can workers do?

The best place to start is **report all hazards** to your employer. Under section 23K of the WA OSH Act the employer must get back to the employee that reports a hazard and tell them how they fixed the hazard or what they intend to do to reduce the level of risk associated with that hazard.

Request the Election of OSH Representatives. OSH Reps should be nominated and elected by workers to represent their interests in regards to health and safety. There is no requirement regarding the number of Reps that are elected so determine how many you should have based on the size of your workplace, the type of work performed, where and when that work is performed. For example if you work in a small office of 20 employees you might only have 1-2 Reps however if you work in a school you might have 4-5 depending on the type of work performed. At the end of the day this should be decided in consultation with workers.

Request the establishment of a workplace OSH Committee. The committee should have at least half of its members directly nominated and elected by staff. The Committee should assist the employer to manage and review any health and safety issues at the workplace. The Committee should consult with workers to identify and resolve health and safety issues.

Get your Reps trained at Unity Training Services. We have been training OSH Reps for 30 years and are professional, passionate and highly qualified Health and Safety Trainers. Visit www.unitytraining.com.au or call 9227 7809.

Contact WorkSafe WA for advice and support **1300 307 877**.

Contact your Union to assist with the resolution of health and safety issue, to assist with elections of Reps and to provide advice and support on safety issues.

At the end of the day, we all want safe workplaces. We want to return from work in the same condition we arrived and enjoy the things that matter most.