

Manual handling - frequently asked questions

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Is there a maximum weight a person can lift during their work?

The Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 (as amended) set no specific requirements such as weight limits.

The ergonomic approach shows clearly that such requirements are based on too simple a view of the problem and may lead to incorrect conclusions. Instead, an ergonomic assessment based on a range of relevant factors is used to determine the risk of injury and point the way to remedial action.

The Regulations establish the following clear hierarchy of control measures:

1. Avoid hazardous manual handling operations so far as is reasonably practicable, for example by redesigning the task to avoid moving the load or by automating or mechanising the process.
2. Make a suitable and sufficient assessment of any hazardous manual handling operations that cannot be avoided.
3. Reduce the risk of injury from those operations so far as is reasonably practicable. Where possible, you should provide mechanical assistance, for example a sack trolley or hoist. Where this is not reasonably practicable, look at ways of changing the task, the load and working environment.

Modern medical and scientific opinion accepts the scale of the problem and stresses the importance of an ergonomic approach to remove or reduce the risk of manual handling injury. Ergonomics is sometimes described as 'fitting the job to the person, rather than the person to the job'. The ergonomic approach looks at manual handling as a whole. It takes into account a range of relevant factors, including the nature of the task, the load, the working environment and individual capability and requires worker participation.

When a more detailed assessment is necessary it should follow the broad structure set out in Schedule 1 to the Regulations. The Schedule lists a number of questions in five categories:

1. the task;
2. the load;
3. the working environment;
4. individual capability (this category is discussed in more detail under regulation 4(3) and its guidance); and
5. other factors, for example use of protective clothing.

Each of these categories may influence the others and none of them can be considered on their own. However, to carry out an assessment in a structured way it is often helpful to begin by breaking the operations down into separate, more manageable items.

References

Manual handling. Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 (as amended). Guidance on Regulations L23 (Third edition) HSE Books 2004 ISBN 0 7176 2823 X , price £8.95

There are also a number of free information leaflets available:

Getting to grips with manual handling: A short guide INDG143(rev2)

Aching arms (or RSI) in small businesses INDG171(rev1)

Mark a parcel - save a back INDG348

Manual handling assessment charts INDG383

Are you making the best use of lifting and handling aids? INDG398

The free leaflets referenced above are available to view and print from the [HSE website](#)[1]

All of the publications referred to are available from HSE Books PO Box 1999, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 2WA Tel: 01787 881165 Fax: 01787 313995

Is there a guide to help with manual handling assessments?

HSE have produced the manual handling assessment chart (MAC) to assist employers with their manual handling assessments. The following information has been taken from the leaflet *Manual handling assessment charts* (INDG383):

Work-related musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), including manual handling injuries, are the most common type of occupational ill health in the UK and their prevention is a priority for HSC/E. It is important to remember that:

1. things can be done to prevent MSDs;
2. preventative measures are cost-effective;
3. all MSDs cannot be prevented; so early reporting of symptoms, proper treatment and suitable rehabilitation is essential.

The steps to follow

The Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 (as amended) establish a clear hierarchy of measures for dealing with risks from manual handling.

These are:

1. avoid hazardous manual handling operations so far as reasonably practicable;
2. assess any hazardous manual handling operations that cannot be avoided; and
3. reduce the risk of injury so far as reasonably practicable.

The MAC

The Manual Handling Assessment Charts (MAC) is a new tool designed to help health and safety inspectors assess the most common risk factors in lifting (and lowering), carrying and team handling operations. Employers, safety officers, safety representatives and others may also find the MAC useful to identify high-risk manual handling operations and help them complete their risk assessments.

Structure of the MAC

There are three types of assessment that can be carried out with the MAC:

1. lifting operations;
2. carrying operations;

3. team handling operations.

For each type of assessment there is an assessment guide and a flowchart.

Note:

The MAC is not appropriate for some manual handling operations, for example those that involve pushing and pulling. Its use does not comprise a full risk assessment (for advice on how to do a full assessment, see L23 *Manual handling*). You must consider individual and psychosocial issues when completing the score sheet. Also, the MAC is not designed to assess risks from workplace upper limb disorders.

The MAC tool can be found on the [HSE website](#)[2]. Copies of INDG383 are available from HSE Books.

What should a manual handling training course involve?

The relevant legislation is the Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 (as amended). With regards to training, the guidance to the Regulations states:

"Section 2 of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and regulations 10 and 13 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 require employers to provide their employees with health and safety information and training. This should be supplemented as necessary with more specific information and training on manual handling injury risks and prevention, as part of the steps to reduce risk required by regulation 4(1)(b)(ii) of the Regulations.

"The risk of injury from a manual handling task will be increased where workers do not have the information or training necessary to enable them to work safely. For example, if they do not know about any unusual characteristics of loads or about the system designed to ensure their safety during manual handling, this may lead to injury. It is essential that where, for example, mechanical handling aids are available, training is provided in their proper use.

"The provision of information and training alone will not ensure safe manual handling. The first objective in reducing the risk of injury should be to design the manual handling operations to be as safe as is reasonably practicable. This will involve improving the task, the working environment and reducing the load weight as appropriate. Where possible the manual handling operations should be designed to suit individuals, not the other way round. Effective training has an important part to play in reducing the risk of manual handling injury. It should not be regarded as a substitute for a safe system of work.

"Employers should make sure that their employees understand clearly how manual handling operations have been designed to ensure their safety. Employees, their safety representatives and safety committees should be involved in developing and implementing manual handling training, and monitoring its effectiveness. This will include, for example, checking that any training is actually being put into practice and that accident rates have reduced. As with assessors, if in-house personnel are used to act as trainers, suitable checks should be made to ensure that they have understood the information given to them and have reached an adequate level of competence.

"HSE does not publish prescriptive guidance on what a 'good' manual handling training course should include or how long it should last. However, in general, courses should be suitable for the individual, tasks and environment involved, use relevant examples and last long enough to cover all the relevant information. Such information is likely to include advice on:

1. manual handling risk factors and how injuries can occur;
2. how to carry out safe manual handling, including good handling technique;
3. appropriate systems of work for the individual's task and environment;

4. use of mechanical aids; and
5. practical work to allow the trainer to identify and put right anything the trainee is not doing safely.

"Employers should ensure they keep sufficient records to show who has been trained, when the training was carried out and what the content of the course was. Employers should establish a planned training programme to ensure all staff receive basic training, with updates as required. This programme should also cover new starters to try to ensure training takes place either before or as close to starting a new job as possible. Managers may also wish to monitor sickness absence and near-miss reporting as one way to assess the effectiveness of the training.

"Employees should be trained to recognise loads whose weight, in conjunction with their shape and other features, and the circumstances in which they are handled, might cause injury. Simple methods for estimating weight on the basis of volume may be taught. Where volume is less important than the density of the contents, as for example in the case of a dustbin containing rubbish, an alternative technique for assessing the safety of handling should be taught, such as rocking the load from side to side before attempting to lift it.

"In general, unfamiliar loads should be treated with caution. For example, it should not be assumed that apparently empty drums or other closed containers are actually empty. They should be tested first, for example by trying to raise one end. Employees should be taught to apply force gradually until either too much strain is felt, in which case the task should be reconsidered, or it is apparent that the task is within the handler's capability.

"When workers are given appropriate training, it is important to ensure that supervisors and other more senior staff are also aware of the good practices that have been recommended, and that they regularly encourage the workforce to adopt appropriate techniques and ensure they continue to be used."