

Preventing Back Injuries

Carrying, lifting, pushing, pulling and other manual material handling operations present significant potential for employee injury. Most back injuries that occur on the job are a result of poor lifting techniques. Manual lifting and carrying of objects should be designed out of jobs whenever possible. When manual lifting cannot be eliminated, completion of the following simple steps will assist in reducing back injuries.

Review the Work Tasks

If work requires continuous material handling or heavy lifting, post-job offer employment physicals, strength testing, as well as physical conditioning and stretching programs and lifting training will ensure that workers are physically fit and knowledgeable on how to avoid back injuries.

Inspect Work Areas

Slips and falls cause many back injuries. Make sure that floors are not wet or slippery, housekeeping practices are acceptable, and all stairs, handrails and walking surfaces are properly maintained. Any substandard conditions observed should be corrected in order to reduce the chance of injury.

Use Mechanical Lifting Devices

Whenever possible, utilize mechanical lifting devices. In addition to reducing injury potential, using material handling equipment will also increase productivity. Lifting capabilities vary by individual; however the potential for injury increases significantly when material to be moved either exceeds 30 pounds or is excessively bulky. Inspect the material handling equipment before each use to ensure it is in proper working order.

Lift with Your Legs

The leg muscles are much stronger than the back muscles. Lift with your legs, not your back. Keep your back straight, the load close to your body and get a good grasp with both hands. Lift gradually-do not jerk. Avoid twisting when carrying a heavy load.

Get Help

Do not try to carry too bulky or too heavy a load. Workers who try to move heavy objects without assistance can exceed their limitations and injure themselves. Ideally, workers should be of approximately the same size for team lifting. One individual needs to be responsible for control of the action to ensure proper coordination. If one worker lifts too soon, shifts the load, or lowers it improperly, either the worker or the person assisting may be injured.

Always

Be sure you can see where you're going. Before you set the load down, be sure that your fingers and toes are in the clear. When carrying long objects, look out for others. As a general rule, the leading end of long pieces should be high and the trailing end should be low.

Summary

By following these procedures, the potential for a back injury or strain can be greatly reduced. Work safe, be safe!

This bulletin is intended only as a reminder and is offered solely as a guide to assist management in its responsibility of providing a safer working environment. This bulletin is not intended to cover all possible hazardous conditions or unsafe acts that may exist. Other unsafe acts or hazardous conditions should also be noted and corrective action taken.