



## Manual handling in the catering industry

Catering Sheet No 13

### Introduction

Almost a fifth of reportable accidents to people working in the catering industry are caused by manual handling. However, injury statistics are likely to be a gross underestimate of the real situation. One reason is that only injuries immediately arising from an obvious incident will be reportable, whereas many injuries arise over a long period of time.

This guidance is aimed mainly at employers and the self-employed. It explains the factors that can increase the risk of injury and suggests practical measures you can take to reduce this.

People who suffer injury are usually involved in:

- lifting, pushing or pulling tables and chairs;
- setting up equipment and tables;
- moving stock to and from storage;
- filling and carrying bulk food containers and pots;
- handling casks and kegs;
- waste disposal; and
- food service.

Outside caterers have a greater range of tasks, involving carrying items over long distances. Often the weight of the load is quite low but this is only one of the factors that affects the degree of risk. Most injuries are strains or sprains to the back. However, a significant proportion involve arm strains or sprains caused by repetitive operations.

### The law

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 require you to assess which risks are significant - this will usually include manual handling.

The Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 require you to avoid the need for any manual handling operations at work which involve a risk to health and safety - so far as is reasonably practicable.

If it is not reasonably practicable to avoid any manual handling operations, you must carry out a manual handling risk assessment to identify how the risk is caused, so each factor can be addressed and measures taken to control the risk.

### Risk assessment

Your assessment should cover these four areas:

- tasks;
- loads;

- working environment; and
- individual capability.

### Risk factors

The following factors increase the risk of injury. You should consider whether any arise in manual handling work in your business.

#### Tasks

Do they involve:

- awkward body movements, eg twisting, stretching, stooping, reaching?
- holding or manipulating loads at a distance from the trunk of the body?
- excessive lifting, lowering, carrying distances of loads?
- risk of sudden movement of loads?
- physically demanding work, especially where breaks are insufficient?
- a rate of work imposed by a process?

#### Loads

Are they:

- heavy, bulky or unwieldy?
- difficult to grasp?
- unstable, sharp or hot?

#### Working environment

Are there:

- lifting tasks in confined spaces, on slippery floors or in poorly lit areas?
- variations in floor levels or work surfaces?
- extremes of temperature or humidity?

#### Individual capability

Does the job:

- require unusual strength or height?
- create a risk for those who are pregnant or have an existing health problem ?
- need special information or training to do it safely?

#### Other factors

Does clothing:

- hinder movement or restrict posture?

The more factors identified, the higher the risk will be. If more than one factor is identified in a particular task, the risk of injury may be significant. After completing the assessment you should take steps to control or eliminate any risks.

## Practical measures to control risks

Almost all manual handling injuries are preventable, usually with minimum cost.

Such action is often simply a case of changing the way a job is performed, such as resiting equipment or adapting working heights. The action required will depend on your findings in the risk assessment but is likely to involve one or more of the following.

Can you avoid manual handling tasks?

This should be your first priority. Examples of avoiding handling include:

- reorganising the layout of the kitchen/workroom to reduce the amount of lifting or carrying;
- fitting a length of hosepipe to a tap so that buckets can be filled at a convenient height (ensure pipe cannot touch the floor);
- using automated bulk handling machines;
- using automated dosing equipment to reduce drum handling.

Can you use mechanical aids to make the task easier?

Such aids include:

- two-wheeled sack trucks;
- four-wheeled trolleys (with lockable castors if needed);
- hoists;
- litter-picking arms;
- false bottoms for deep sinks.

Can you redesign individual tasks?

You should try to :

- reduce the amount of twisting, bending, stooping, stretching, pushing and pulling;
- reduce the number of times it is necessary to do the task (but without increasing the load each time);
- store heavy items on shelves at waist height;
- use trolleys to move loads around;
- use team working for tasks such as moving furniture.

Can you make loads easier to handle?

For example:

- buying cooking oil in easier-to-handle cardboard boxes with sturdy handles/grips;
- breaking down trays of A10 size cans before loading onto storage shelving;
- using concentrates of cleaning chemicals where appropriate;
- putting heavy equipment such as chest freezers on castors (lockable) to make cleaning routines easier;
- using lighter loads, eg 25 kg rather than 50 kg sacks.

What can you do to improve the workplace conditions?

For example:

- replace or repair uneven or slippery floors;
- provide trolley ramps at changes in floor level;

- ensure shelving is not overloaded;
- install automatic doors if staff have to frequently carry things through them.

## Information, instruction and training

It is difficult to get rid of all manual handling tasks. If there is still a risk, remember that providing information and training - for example, training employees in safe lifting techniques - are legal requirements.

A range of leaflets, training packs, videos etc (some free of charge) is available from many sources to help you improve your employees' awareness of the risks and the precautions they should take.

## Further reading

Manual handling. Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992: Guidance on Regulations L23 HSE Books 1998 ISBN 0 7176 2415 3

Manual handling: Solutions you can handle HSG115 HSE books 1994 ISBN 0 7176 0693 7

Work-related upper limb disorders: A guide to prevention HSG60 HSE Books 1994 ISBN 0 7176 0475 6

## HSE free leaflets

Getting to grips with manual handling: A short guide for employers INDG143(rev) HSE Books 1993

While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the references listed in this publication, their future availability cannot be guaranteed.

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