Critical risk: Manual tasks – involving heavy loads

Identifying the risk:

Manual tasks used to be referred to as ‘manual handling’. The term ‘manual task’ refers to physical activity, and is defined in the National Standard for Manual Tasks 2007 as ‘any activity requiring a person to use any part of their musculoskeletal system in performing their work’.

In the meat industry injuries resulting from manual tasks account for over 55% of all workplace injuries.

Hazardous manual tasks can include the following characteristics:

- repetitive or sustained application of force
- repetitive or sustained awkward posture
- repetitive or sustained movement.

In the meat industry these characteristics can involve:

- **lifting** – i.e. live animals, carcases, cartons or cuts of meat
- **lowering** – i.e. cartons and pallets in the load out area
- **pushing** – i.e. sides or carcases on a rail or cartons along a belt
- **pulling** – i.e. pelts and hides
- **carrying** – i.e. tubs of meat, parts of carcases and cuts of meat
- **holding or restraining** – i.e. live animals.

Potential impact of the risk:

Performing some manual tasks can be hazardous, potentially causing musculoskeletal disorders which can lead to death, injury or disease. Sudden damage caused by heavy loads can lead to body-stressing injuries and conditions such as:

- sprains and strains of muscles, ligaments and tendons e.g. back strain
- joint injuries or degeneration e.g. frozen shoulder or arthritis of the back
- disc protrusions, disc herniation or disc degeneration of the back or neck
• nerve injury or compression e.g. carpal tunnel syndrome.

**Supervisor Responsibilities:**

Employers must provide a safe work environment by implementing adequate controls to all identified hazards.

It is the supervisor’s responsibility to:

• identify hazardous manual tasks
• assess the risks, and where possible eliminate the risks. If elimination is not possible then persons with control must minimise the risks as far as is reasonably practicable.
• monitor the rate of throughput to ensure that workers are working at a speed they can manage safely and not working beyond their capacity
• ensure that the employee has received adequate training in correctly lifting
• conduct a risk assessment in consultation with the employees
• complete regular inspection and testing of the equipment with the WHS representative.

**Preventing the risk:**

*Hierarchy of control measures*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effectiveness</th>
<th>Types of control</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most effective</td>
<td>Elimination</td>
<td>Workers in this area often use equipment such as pallet-jacks and forklifts to eliminate the need to lift heavy loads.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Substitution</td>
<td>Using a tub trolley to move heavy loads rather than carrying the load distances.</td>
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<td>Isolation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Engineering controls</td>
<td></td>
<td>Designing and implementing roller conveyors and flanking machines to remove the need to carry the load. Redesign the working environment to follow a straight line to limit twisting while carrying a heavy load.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Least effective</td>
<td>Administrative controls</td>
<td>Provide information, training and supervision to workers. Discuss SOPs and work instructions on induction.</td>
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<td>Personal Protective Equipment</td>
<td>Provide back support belts to reduce the risk of back injuries.</td>
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**Further information:**

Australian Meat Industry Manual Handling Resource, MINTRAC
National Standard for Manual Tasks, Safe Work Australia