

MATERIAL HANDLING

Material handling accounts for about one quarter of all occupational injuries; the most common injuries being strains, sprains and contusions. The principal causes of the injuries are the mishaps resulting from improper lifting, failing to use available equipment and unsafe work practices.

Some pointers for the prevention of injuries during manual material handling are:

1. Inspect the load to be lifted for jagged or sharp edges. Use gloves when necessary.
2. Size up the load. Is it manageable, or will this task take two?
3. Inspect the route where the load will be carried. Especially look for tripping hazards and adequate room to maneuver safely.
4. Clean off greasy, wet or dirty items before lifting. Keep your hands free of anything that will prevent a firm grasp such as oil, grease or ragged gloves.
5. Bend with your knees keeping your back straight. Get a firm grasp on the load, and make sure to have a solid footing before beginning. Once you lift the load, keep it close to your body.
6. Keep fingers away from edges where pinches may occur. This is especially important when carrying through doors or when setting a load down.
7. When handling unwieldy loads such as pipe and lumber, keep hands and fingers back from the ends. Crushing injuries, even amputations can result without these good manual material handling techniques.
8. High level stacking should always be on pallets. Riding the tines of a forklift is inviting a fall and serious injury. Never work off a pallet to retrieve stock from high shelving, or to empty trash into a dumpster. Only an approved cage with railings should be used for this purpose.

Think ahead. Every lift should be planned before it is made. Good planning is the best method of preventing material handling injuries. Proper lifting uses your leg muscles more than your back. So get a good footing - falling while carrying a load or under a load can compound any injury that occurs.

Material handling is made more difficult, when water, snow, mud or grease is permitted to accumulate. Keep work areas and floors clean, dry and free of debris.