



HAZARDOUS MANUAL TASKS

The majority of injuries that occur in the Queensland hospitality industry are directly related to work activities involving 'hazardous manual tasks' (formerly called manual handling). These are actions like lifting, moving, pushing or pulling objects. These can occur with repetitive, sustained or sudden force. Examples of this might be lifting too many beer cartons at once, trying to lift a full beer keg on your own or even just pushing a heavy trolley with too many cartons on board.

Many of our staff are young people and the nature of employment casual; which means an increased health and safety risk profile (less experience, reduced job ownership and a 'ten foot tall and bullet-proof' mentality, with young males in particular). High staff turnover rates are another factor which can lead to reluctance to invest in training. It's a physical job at times with a manual labour component.

A hazardous manual task injury is one that can generally be caused in either of two ways:

- By a sudden trauma such as a direct blow to a limb or the body when you're lifting or moving something, over exerting yourself when you're lifting a load that is beyond your capabilities or using the wrong technique; or
- Wear and tear over a long period of time on certain joints or body parts when you're doing the same activity repetitively – like a lower back injury caused by unloading beer cartons in a certain way, every day.

Actually, it's usually the second case that is more prevalent. A well known example is 'tennis elbow', which is in fact a repetitive strain injury that you can pick up over time doing any sort of recurrent physical activity.

Q. How much can I safely lift?

A. The *Work Health and Safety Regulation 2011* does not specify weight limits. This is because there are many factors that impact on the risk, not just the weight of the item handled. Instead, the legislation requires that the risk management process be followed to determine how you identify and assess a hazardous manual task.

Q. What is the risk management process for a hazardous manual task?

A. Identify the hazard, assess the risk, determine and implement control measures, and evaluate/review the process.



Q. When I'm assessing the hazardous manual task risk, what factors should I consider?

A. Factors that should be considered include:

- The nature of the load such as size, shape, grip, weight, stability, texture and temperature;
- How the load is handled e.g. physically lifted or moved by mechanical aids;
- The nature and layout of the work area i.e. is there work benches, furniture and fittings or other equipment used by workers that could affect their working posture;
- How work is organised, which can intensify task demands – staffing levels, hours and pace of work, rest breaks, supervision, maintenance, task variability, communication and reporting procedures;
- Individual factors such as skills and experience, physical characteristics, job satisfaction, personal protective equipment and clothing;
- How often the load is required to be moved or lifted; and
- The postures, movements and forces relating to the task.

Q. Is team-lifting an adequate control measure for hazardous manual tasks?

A. Team-lifting is not the preferred option as it brings its own risks. Task redesign or the use of mechanical aids is preferred. However, in lieu of that yes, it's acceptable if performed correctly.

Q. What is the best way to lift?

A. There is no one 'best way' to lift. Any manual lifting that requires force, awkward or static postures, or is repetitive contains some risk of injury. Instead the question that should be asked is 'Why are you lifting?' Task redesign and/or the use of mechanical aids which eliminate the need to lift are always preferred.

Q. Are pre-work stretching exercises good at controlling manual task risks?

A. Stretching does not prevent injury. The focus should be on controlling the risk by eliminating or modifying the tasks performed.



Q. Men can lift heavier things than women. Why can't the men do all the lifting?

A. On average, women possess about two-thirds the strength of men. Whenever workplaces advise they 'get the men to do the lifting' it is a flag that the task may be hazardous, as it requires high physical effort. The workplace should assess the task and use other methods of controlling the risk (if practicable).

Q. How can you prevent or stop getting injured when doing this activity?

A. There are plenty of things you can do to prevent being injured. When you think about it, a lot of this is 'commonsense':

- Organise the work area to reduce bending, twisting and stretching;
- Use mechanical aids like trolleys and carts;
- Use other people to help you lift heavy things (team lift);
- Lift and carry heavy loads properly by keeping the load close to the body and lifting with the legs – not the back;
- Don't try to lift too much – this is very common practice;
- Keep a correct posture using the natural curves of the spine;
- Take frequent breaks and rest – warm up again if you take an extended break; and
- Keep fit and maintain a good weight.

(For more information, go to the *QHA Safe Work Manual* on this site)

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